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DUNGEON

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Adapting "The Lich-Queen's Beloved"

By Rodney Thompson

I love continuity. While working on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, I learned to master it (as well as anyone can master the continuity of such a vast fictional universe). Even before then, I tried to make different aspects of the same universe work together. Back in the days of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd Edition, I reworked old Greyhawk modules to fit the continuity of my Al-Qadim campaign. Later, I adapted elements of my 2nd Edition Forgotten Realms® Campaign Setting adventure for use in 3rd Edition. In the last year, I've run two epic-level 4th Edition games that are direct sequels to the Age of Worms adventures from the World of Greyhawk campaign setting by having my group convert their characters from 3rd Edition D&D. I've even included references to the Ghost Tower of Inverness, another World of Greyhawk location, in the most recent D&D Encounters season.

Conquering the challenge of connecting two seemingly disparate elements is rewarding, both as a creative exercise and as a source of interesting ideas. The imagination involved in bridging concepts is what makes character creation in the *D&D Gamma World Roleplaying Game* so appealing: When you give me "android" and "yeti" as character options, putting them together challenges me in an entertaining way.

Some months ago, I decided to bring my Forgotten Realms game to its climax, but I wasn't sure how to wrap things up. I was leafing through old issues of *Dungeon* magazine when I came across issue 100, featuring "The Lich-Queen's Beloved"—a famous adventure pitting the players against the githyanki lich queen Vlaakith. If you don't already have the original adventure, you can download it as a companion piece to this article.

I had never had the chance to run the adventure in 3rd Edition, so converting it to 4th Edition to use as my campaign capstone excited me—especially after I discovered that none of my players had ever run, played, or even read the adventure. This conversion would help my players, who had been my gaming group only for 4th Edition, experience a classic part of the Dungeons & Dragons tradition, while tying my campaign into the larger Dungeons & Dragons experience.

I knew that playing a Chris Perkins adventure, filled with great lore, would mark a high point in our game. What I couldn't predict was how this conversion would shape my view of adventures and adventure design in 4th Edition.

Conversion Philosophy

After my initial reread of "The Lich-Queen's Beloved," I made a few basic decisions. First, I would reproduce the original experience as faithfully as possible: Killer traps would remain as deadly as ever, and powerful spell effects would pack their same punch. Second, I would adapt mechanics with more precision and less "re-envisioning" than usual. Third, I would convert the monsters over using a direct correlation between challenge rating (CR) and level; thus, the CR 16 tl'a'ikiths (more on them later) would become level 16 soldiers. I did more redesign during monster conversion than I did anywhere else, because I wanted the levels to match the CRs so that the monsters would present about the same challenge as before. Finally, I would not alter the number of monsters in a given encounter. If three githyanki guarded a door in the original, three githyanki

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would guard that door in my 4th Edition conversion. Effectively, I decided to ignore much of the advice from the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*® regarding building encounters and instead let the chips fall where they might, using the same assumptions Chris Perkins had used when designing the adventure for 3rd Edition.

With these three guiding principles in mind, I set out to begin the conversion.

Putting in the Hours

The conversion process went more smoothly than I expected. For one thing, I already had a sizable stable of monsters converted. When I wrote the githyanki section of *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*™, I had relied on "The Lich-Queen's Beloved" for source material, so all I had to do now was to update the damage numbers to bring them in line with post-*Monster Manual*® 3 expectations. That approach took care of a lot of the rank-and-file githyanki the players would run into, allowing me to substitute them where appropriate for the githyanki troops that had class levels. In other cases, I took the equivalent creature from the appropriate book and adjusted its level. To convert the red dragon Holocaust, for example, I used the red dragon from *Monster Vault*™ and removed levels from it to match Holocaust's challenge rating.

Later in the adventure, the characters end up face to face (to face) with Dessakrul, a two-headed red dragon. Again, I began with a stock red dragon. After adjusting the level, I added a few powers from the new hydra to give the dragon a more two-headed feel. This approach illustrates my first lesson of conversion:

Kr'y'izoth **Level 16 Artillery**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki XP 1,400

HP 122; **Bloodied** 61 **Initiative** +10
AC 30, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28 **Perception** +13
Speed 7 Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist 10** necrotic; **Vulnerable 10** radiant

Traits

☼ **Heat Mirage** ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that attacks the kr'y'izoth from outside of the aura rolls its attack twice and keeps the lower result.

Standard Actions

Blackflame Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of the kr'y'izoth's next turn.

Lightning Bolt (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d10 + 3 lightning damage.

Scorching Ray (fire, force) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature, or two creatures adjacent to each other); +21 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 13 fire and force damage.

Flesh to Stone (force) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d12 + 10 force damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Save: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).
Second Failed Save: The target is instead petrified (save ends).

Move Actions

Telekinetic Leap ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the kr'y'izoth or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.

Triggered Actions

Blackflame Shield (fire, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An adjacent enemy touches the kr'y'izoth or hits it with a melee attack.
Effect (Opportunity Action): The triggering enemy takes 2d12 fire and necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +18
Str 16 (+11) **Dex** 14 (+10) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 20 (+13) **Int** 25 (+15) **Cha** 8 (+7)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic

Whenever possible, use the tools you already have—it's a big time-saver.

Of course, I still had plenty of work to do on the more involved conversions. I made the 4th Edition versions of the kr'y'izoth (undead githyanki spellcasters whose life essences Vlaakith drained) and the tl'a'ikiths (their martial counterparts) my top priority. Because these two creatures show up multiple times throughout the adventure, I knew that their conversions would go a long way. After finishing them, I had taken care of most of my monsters. I've included two of them here as examples.

Tl'a'ikith	**Level 16 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki	XP 1,400
HP 157; **Bloodied** 78	**Initiative** +14
AC 32, **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28	**Perception** +13
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial; **Vulnerable 10** radiant	
Traits	
☼ **Attractive Whispers** ✦ **Aura** 3	
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is pulled up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the tl'a'ikith.	
Insubstantial	
The tl'a'ikith takes half damage from attacks. Any time the tl'a'ikith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Silver Sword** (psychic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 10 psychic damage.	
⸸ **Violent Slash** (psychic, weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 18 psychic damage, and the target is removed from play (save ends). When the target saves, it appears in an unoccupied square of the tl'a'ikith's choice adjacent to the tl"a'ikith.	
Move Actions	
Telekinetic Leap ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the tl'a'ikith or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.	
Triggered Actions	
Intercession of Will (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: Any enemy within 3 squares of the tl'a'ikith makes an attack that does not include the tl'a'ikith as a target.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The tl'a'ikith shifts up to 3 squares and makes a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy as a free action.	
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 18 (+12) **Wis** 20 (+13)	
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 10 (+8)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech	
Equipment *+4 githyanki silver longsword (Manual of the Planes™)*	

The next step of the conversion process entailed adapting traps and magical effects from the 3rd Edition adventure to my 4th Edition game. Fortunately, Chris did me a big favor when he based his array of traps on the tir'su glyphs of the githyanki language and then reused the glyphs within his adventure. Rechristening them "a dialect of Deep Speech," I converted each glyph as faithfully as possible. Because the originals glyphs mostly dealt damage, I could replicate them by having mine deal about the same damage as the encounter power of a monster of equivalent level. When I was finished, I had seven traps that I could use throughout the adventure.

With the monsters and traps handled, I could now tackle the tricky part: the other miscellaneous magical effects.

Much of the adventure takes place in the Palace of Whispers, home to *the whispers of the damned,* an effect disquieting enough to shake the nerve of even the bravest warrior. In 3rd Edition, a player failing the initial saving throw took a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks while in the palace. I decided to keep the same effect, with one exception: I changed the Will save to an attack against Will that triggered when the character first entered the structure.

My players soon discovered that they were no longer in the same "appropriate challenges with limited durations" game we'd been playing. Although this approach initially frustrated them, I decided not to budge because I wanted to see what they would do. To my (pleasant) surprise, my players reacted to the new dynamic by becoming more creative. During their first retreat from the Palace of Whispers, for example, they asked a wizard to deafen them magically so that the palace's disquieting susurrations could not affect them.

The strange doors that filled the lich queen's palace also challenged the adventurers in various ways: One type required psionic powers to open, another dealt tons of damage to living creatures when they passed through, and still another kind, seemingly composed of undead flesh, refused to open for anyone other than Vlaakith. I converted these perilous portals faithfully, but I also added a few elements because I did not want my players to feel stymied; after all, the adventure proceeds through these doors. In my new version, items scattered throughout the palace enable characters to open certain doors or pass through them harmlessly; for example, one potion turns a character temporarily undead, whereas another provides a small amount of psionic power points. I placed these items in logical locations that would also require the characters to circumvent the doors a few times before finding them.

It worked. Although the players initially felt frustrated by the doors, they soon grew more and more resourceful. This adjustment gave rise to an interesting pacing dynamic: The early stages of exploring the Palace of Whispers consisted of a constant struggle against the palace itself, but, as the characters progressed—battling denizens and finding treasure caches along the way—they gained the means to move on to different challenges. The players became better at navigating the palace and, as its challenges faded into the background, the dangers posed by the monsters (and, eventually, Vlaakith herself) took center stage.

End Results

In the end, a conversion succeeds or fails at the game table. This one went surprisingly well, even though its design sensibilities were so different from those of the campaign that preceded it. Up to this point I had designed my adventures by the book, worried that deviating from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*'s advice would produce a game different from the one other people were playing, and therefore useless to anyone but me. It turns out that my fears were unfounded.

Running "The Lich-Queen's Beloved" using 4th Edition mechanics (while keeping the 3rd Edition flavor) added amusing new dynamics to the campaign's climax. I enjoyed watching my players relearn lessons from earlier editions, such as the caution they began exercising after they started running into things they couldn't overpower. I'm no big fan of the "your players should constantly fear for their characters' lives" philosophy, but that doesn't mean I didn't enjoy seeing my group exercise a bit more prudence (on the other hand, perhaps they had grown so cavalier because I had failed to instill a true sense of danger earlier in the campaign). I also enjoyed how the adventure's complexity drove the players to return to old roleplaying standbys, such as mapping the dungeon themselves and keeping track of what they encountered and where.

With a few exceptions (such as the tricks for bypassing the doors), I resisted the temptation to provide ways around problems. This decision ran counter to my usual style of adventure design, in which a character overcame a noncombat test by making a skill check or passing a skill challenge. As soon as the players saw that they couldn't just make a skill check to design a spell to counter *whispers of the damned*, they realized that they needed to become more creative. The way they rose to the occasion made me realize that I had underestimated them when I designed my old adventures.

If making challenges harder on my players taught me something, so did making encounters easier. I discovered that it was OK for players to face only two opponents in one fight, even if neither of them was elite. The encounter went faster, and the players enjoyed occasionally rolling over the opposition. This taught me an important lesson: Attrition still means something in Dungeons & Dragons. Taking a little damage in a fight might be no big deal, but taking a little damage in five straight fights carries a toll because daily abilities run out and unspent healing surges dwindle.

When I looked at the pressure placed on the party's resources over an entire adventure instead of a string of encounters, I found the results liberating. I realized that I did not need to balance every encounter to fall within an "acceptable range," because, over a long enough period, the characters would end up drained of the same resources anyway. Even better, this approach made the hard fights feel harder. Retreating to preserve resources became viewed as a necessary and acceptable tactic, because the players knew that more challenges awaited, and they couldn't count on having the resources needed to tackle them otherwise.

In the end, I learned a few things about both adventure design and 4th Edition that I'll carry forward into future games. First, I found that my players face challenges more creatively—and feel more satisfied afterward—when I deprive them of an easy way out. Second, I learned that spikes of high tension and periods of low tension are good, and that having a wider variance in encounter difficulty works out because of long-term attrition. Third, I realized that I could include "unfair" elements"—such as instant-kill traps or ongoing effects that messed with characters—as long as I used them to punctuate the dangers of the adventure and not as constant beat-downs. Fourth, I learned that exploration is essential to the classic Dungeons & Dragons feel, and that traps and hazards are more than set dressing—they constitute an important part of the exploration and discovery process. The weird doors in the Palace of Whispers aren't just obstacles; they are something to investigate—dire entryways that reinforce the alien feel of the adventure's setting.

Finally, my greatest lesson was that my players were better equipped to handle challenges than I thought. Even when they failed, they found ways to continue the adventure as long as I gave them enough freedom to execute their own plans.

Converting to Other Editions

Here is my quick take on converting "The Lich-Queen's Beloved" to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 1st or 2nd Edition.

The 1st Edition *Fiend Folio* provides basic information on githyanki that we can use to populate our dungeon. That's half the battle. We also need a way to convert the rich variety of githyanki variants that make "The Lich-Queen's Beloved" so memorable. Luckily, we can summarize 1st Edition monsters in just a few lines, so we can convert many of these terrific monsters quickly.

From the original adventure, we know that the lich queen rarely allows her servants to grow

powerful enough to threaten her. Instead, she drains their life essences as a part of her plan to achieve apotheosis. The *Fiend Folio* tells us that the supreme commanders of the githyanki top out at 11th level, and Tiamat, whom Vlaakith serves, has 16 Hit Dice, so it follows that Vlaakith herself is around 13th or 14th level. Here is Vlaakith's entry in *AD&D Monster Manual* format.

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *0*
MOVE: 6"
HIT DICE: *13 (104 hit points)*
TREASURE TYPE: *100% H, S, T, U*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *3*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *2-12/3-18/3-18*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Magic use*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Magic weapons to hit; not affected by charm, cold, electricity or fire*
INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *250*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All*
CHANCE OF:
Speaking: *100%*
Magic Use: *100%*
Sleeping: *0%*

Vlaakith's multiple attacks come from her *paralyzing touch* (any creature hit by this attack must make a saving throw against paralysis, with failure indicating permanent paralysis) and her *dancing sword*. Vlaakith can cast two spells of each level, up to and including 6th, and she knows every magic-user spell.

Now let's take a crack at converting the creatures that populate the lich queen's palace.

Duthka'gith: Because these creatures are half-githyanki/half-red dragon hybrids, the easiest approach is to start with githyanki and then layer on a few red dragon traits (AC: *3*; MV: 6"; HD: *10*; HP: *45*; # AT: *1*; D: *1-8*; SA: *Breath weapon per red dragon;* SD: *Unaffected by heat*).

Tl'a'ikiths: For these undead githyanki warriors, begin with a basic githyanki and add a few traits similar to a lich. Because tl'a'ikiths are incorporeal, you can adapt the requirement of needing magic weapons to hit (AC: *4*; MV: 6"; HD: *9*; HP: *41*; # AT: *1*; D: *1-8*; SA: *Psionic ability 150* ; SD: *Unaffected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; +1 or better weapons to hit*).

Kr'y'izoths: Much like tl'a'ikiths, you build kr'y'izoths by starting with a githyanki and adding undead defenses. Since these creatures were spellcasters in life, give them magical ability, as well as *blackflame shield*. (AC: *5*; MV: 6"; HD: *9*; HP: *41*; # AT: *1*; D: *1-8*; SA: *Magic use, psionic ability 150;* SD: *Cannot be affected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; any creature that touches the kr'y'izoth or hits it with a melee attack takes 3d6 damage from* blackflame shield).

For the conversion to 2nd Edition, start with the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* stats above and convert the movement to a standard 2nd Edition movement rating. Otherwise, much of what's in the stat block still applies. The *Monstrous Manual* lists statistics for the rank-and-file githyanki, so it is a good starting point for building the typical githyanki found in the adventure. You will need the optional psionics rules from *The Complete Psionics Handbook* to finish Vlaakith and her minions.

Obviously, these are the bare bones. It's up to you to flesh them out by picking spells and psionic abilities for your monsters. After that, equip a few githyanki with class levels to add variety to your player's enemies. The system already includes equivalents of the traps and magic items that lie scattered throughout the adventure. Then again, you might find creating the glyph traps from scratch in your system of choice to be worthwhile—not to mention fun.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual® 3*, the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands™*, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms™*, and *Monster Vault™*.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

Jalander's Dodge

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Patrick McEvoy

Until recently, Mathym Jalander was a merchant like many others—a harried trader, less energetic than he once was, trying to make a living in increasingly tough times by any means he could. Now he's a hunted man, in hiding and desperate to change his name and face (the latter perhaps by use of the much-rumored "masks of living flesh," if he can find one).

What made him different from thousands of less infamous merchants is the means of enrichment he recently discovered and put to use: the deception that has come to be called Jalander's Dodge.

The Problem

Sooner or later, cities that grow swiftly face a problem: Things that were built at about the same time wear out at about the same time. Entire streets of cobblestones, not to mention all the houses' roof tiles (or shakes or thatch), need to be replaced seemingly at once.

Except for structures that are vacant or that collapse into the streets, fixes to privately owned buildings must be funded by the purses of their owners. However, streets, sewers, public pumps and troughs, city walls, and the like are civic responsibilities. And when widespread repairs are necessary, that usually means new or higher taxes.

Such situations—and the taxes—have recently come to many places in the Realms. In Cormyr, Sembia, and the independent cities of Ankhapur, Baldur's Gate, Milvarune, and Procampur, stiff new import duties have been imposed on wines and spirits. In some cases, these duties amount to a silver piece per bottle, 2 sp per handkeg, and 4 gp for a cask; in others, they are a measure of total cargo cost and can run as high as 20 percent.

These taxes have cut sharply into the profits of all who import wines and spirits, and such losses have—as usual—encouraged a distinct upswing in smuggling.

The Solution

Smugglers who openly cheat the authorities risk much. They face injury or death if they fight lawkeepers; increased costs from their preparations for

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subterfuge; and fines, loss of goods, imprisonment, or exile if they are caught and sentenced for their actions. Nor do the smugglers wish to chance what merchants of Amn call the "way of impatient fools"—gathering friends with swords to storm the coin vaults and seize large amounts, thus becoming rich (or perhaps hunted or dead) overnight.

So, like treasury clerks who quietly steal a copper piece here and a copper piece there for years and grow wealthy slowly, wise smugglers prefer more subtle methods. Nothing goes undetected forever, but a dodge that stretches out over a decade can allow those who work it to retire rich (and, if they are smart, to a distant elsewhere).

In the case of the wine duties, one of these wiser smugglers is the merchant Mathym Jalander of Marsember. Misfortune exposed him eventually, but his dodge is a truly creative one that is still being used profitably by others. Jalander thought of a new use for the absorptive properties of the roouddan, a bulk vegetable known as the "red turnip of Proskur."

All around the Sea of Fallen Stars, a turniplike vegetable called the roouddan is a staple of peasant fare, a thickener in stews, and a base for slop mashes fed to livestock (not to mention an ingredient in fiery small beers when allowed to ferment). The vegetable keeps long and well when guarded from heat and sun, so it can last the winter stored in a frigid cellar, buried in a stableyard, or kept in a barn bin covered with straw. It is regarded as a mainstay food by garrisons, larder-keepers, and sailors because it resists rot and is edible raw. For someone who has a sharp knife to slice its tough outer skin and a way to season its rather flavorless flesh and, a roouddan makes a portable meal. For all these reasons, great amounts of the vegetable are imported into coastal places around the Inner Sea and not taxed at all.

Now, if only highly taxed wine could be hidden inside an untaxed bulk foodstuff . . .

The Dodge

Exactly how Jalander hit upon his method of using roouddans to soak up wine is a topic he has never discussed. He must have experimented in secret for more than a season to find bulk cargo that could serve as a sponge for wine, not leak or otherwise reveal what it was carrying to inspectors, and not spoil or lose overmuch of the wine in the process.

Hiding valuables in—or under—bulk cargo has been tried many times in the past. Most lawkeepers have bright lights (lamps fitted with reflector shields that intensify their radiance), long probing rods, and nosehounds (sniffer dogs and a variety of other creatures, from trained rats to tressym) that uncover contraband sooner or later.

In the case of wine, containers made of skins are too fragile, and kegs are too hard to conceal (though people have tried floating small, tar-sealed kegs in the bilges of large ships), so smuggled wine ends up in small, flat glass vials. Those containers are expensive, too, and lawkeepers watch for them. One classic hiding place for such vials is a false or additional cargo bed built over the real deck, which is heaped with roouddans. Sometimes, the vials are hidden inside hollowed-out roouddans, which when ready for harvest (discernible when their skins turn from bright red to a dull, ruddy brown) are ovoid and about as long as a large man's hand and as thick as his fist.

It has long been known that roouddans are very absorbent. They reach their ripe size by taking in copious quantities of water, which explains why they can't be grown in dry climates and how they can be induced to take on other flavors (by being boiled or long-soaked in spiced water or broth). Jalander discovered that they can take in wine, hold it without leaking, be treated to keep nosehounds from scenting the wine easily, and later be made to relinquish their cargo, yielding wine that has not changed appreciatively in hue or flavor.

The absorption is enhanced by washing dirt off the roouddans and soaking them in water of the right temperature (as warm as human blood) for about half a day. They are then taken out of the water, rolled gently on sacking to turn them from dripping to moist, and dropped into vats or shallow pans of wine. A large-end-of-average-size roouddan can hold just under half a bottle of wine. It takes almost a day to "vanish" a large keg of wine, given sufficient roouddans, and absorption happens fastest if the turnips are touched by sunlight, although overly strong, bright heat will evaporate some of the wine.

Then comes the crucial step in banishing the lingering odor of wine from the vegetables. The roouddans are rolled in flour, cornmeal, or sand—they don't need to be coated or covered; rubbing them or turning them over and over in a small bowl of the meal is sufficient—and left to dry for a day. They are then stable as wine-carriers.

If a roouddan in this state is eaten raw, the wine is tasted readily, but intoxication results only if the diner quickly eats an amount that is uncomfortable for an adult human. Livestock that feast on "cellaring" roouddans become drunk. If a cooked roouddan is eaten, no intoxication results and no wine leaks out, but the vegetable has a tart-sweet flavor, having been altered by the wine in a way that some people find pleasant and others abhor.

After the roouddans are imported and stored in warehouses, they are pulped—crushed in a press or mashed by hand—and the wine runs out. The mash can be used for cooking; it retains the tart wine flavor, which is usually countered by pepper or other strong spices.

If the roouddans were rolled in sand, the wine must be filtered through fine-weave cloth; otherwise, it is simply collected and bottled. Wine that has been stored in roouddans doesn't keep long or well in skins or kegs.

Weak red wines are sometimes soured by being "turnip-treated" in this manner, but the process intensifies the hue and taste of the expensive, popular firewines. Jalander became very wealthy smuggling such spirits into Cormyr.

His wealth soon proved to be needed. By the time his dodge was discovered, he owned several ships to escape in, distant holdings to escape to, and local properties that continue to enrich him from afar. (The rents on these properties are paid to Sembian agents, and someone—neither human nor male, so obviously not Jalander—shows up from time to time in Saerloon to collect the coins.) All the Crown of Cormyr recovered in lieu of its lost duty revenues was the merchant's modest, mold-stricken home and shop on a back street in Marsember. The authorities are not aware of his other local holdings or the rents that are collected for him.

Jalander's current whereabouts are unknown. He has been sighted everywhere from Waterdeep to Telflamm, from Var the Drowned to mines north of the Moonsea, but the more reliable reports put him somewhere in Tethyr or the Vilhon Wilds. Courtiers of the Royal Treasury in Suzail estimate his wealth as "above five hundred thousand thousand gold," and they have promised a one-tenth share of anything recovered (plus land and a ten-season exemption from all taxes) to any bounty hunters who bring Jalander back "alive and likely to remain so for a season, but not necessarily whole." As a result, many armed folk have been looking for Mathym Jalander, and they continue to do so energetically.

The Future

As of this writing, Jalander's fate is unknown in the wider Realms. However, the (perhaps deliberate) bungling by Crown courtiers in revealing his dodge has led people in the Forest Kingdom, Westgate, and Sembia (which is as far as these details seem to have spread) to realize that they can try the same trick with poisons, magic potions, and some of the subtler perfumes—all highly taxed, import-prohibited substances that command high prices. It seems likely that experiments are proceeding in dozens of cellars, warehouses, and wizards' towers.

In fact, young Lord Irstrel Roaringhorn (the fourth son of the current patriarch of the Cormyrean noble house) was discovered trying to use roouddans to soak up strong distilled spirits. He was given a royal command to desist but escaped harsher consequences because he was operating within the borders of Cormyr and he claimed to be interested only in avoiding broken bottles when taking his tipples on long hunts or rough rides—not in smuggling at all. Some War Wizards even believed him.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

Backdrop: Necropolis of the Sword

By Bruce R. Cordell

Illustrations by Vincent Proce

My novel *Sword of the Gods* includes a scene where the characters Demascus and Chant discover a portal to a mysterious destination, and Demascus knows that his enemy Kalkan has recently fled through the portal.

When Chant and Demascus decide to follow Kalkan, they find a strange new place—the lost necropolis of Khalusk.

An excerpt from this scene begins on the next page. The article following it provides background history, context, and a bit of game mechanics for Khalusk. You can use the information to inspire a few D&D game encounters, or use it as the basis of a longer adventure set in one of the lost places of the Forgotten Realms® setting.

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Demascus stood before the portal. The darkness was a physical blot, hanging just an inch off the wall. The lip of the effect wavered and blurred, as if renegotiating its terms with reality every moment. Beyond it, he imagined Kalkan watched.

What would happen if I simply walk away? he wondered. He could break the cycle the pictures hinted at. Leave Airspur, and settle down in some distant land and learn a peaceful trade. Beer brewing maybe, or storytelling. This is my last chance to stay ignorant. My last chance to stay myself.

And if he did turn away, he'd resign himself to forever wonder why he'd killed a priest in cold blood.

"Let's go find our friend," he announced.

"Lead on," Chant said, "We'll follow."

Demascus unsheathed his sword and grabbed the Veil in his other hand. Just to see if he'd get an answer, he addressed it. "Veil, what lies beyond this portal? Is it my tomb?"

A single word appeared in pale light in the fabric:

Yes.

SWORD OF THE GODS

The novel *Sword of the Gods* opens with Demascus waking on a cold slab of an ancient altar with no memory, other than the knowledge that someone—or something—wants to kill him. He eventually learns he's got several enemies, one of whom might be the person he once was.

The story features a trip to a subterranean mausoleum city of undead, where Demascus hopes to corner one of his foes, find his missing weapon, and maybe learn the secret so important that he tried to keep it from himself.

www.swordofthegods.com

Demascus stepped through, and found himself on the shore of a sunless sea.

An earthy breeze engulfed and cooled him. He was underground, in some kind of canyon-sized cave chamber. A ramshackle collection of boulders formed a circle on the cave floor, and he was standing in the center of it.

He stepped out of the stone-bounded area to clear the portal, and to get a better look at the island that lay at the center of the half-drowned vault. Dark wavelets rolled to the island's bone-strewn shore. Pale cavelight from luminescent growth and faded runes illuminated dozens of wide catacomb mouths along the island's periphery, providing watery paths deeper inside. The failed majesty of ruins lay heaped above the winding entrances like a crown of broken spires.

He didn't know what he'd been expecting, but this wasn't it.

"Where on Toril are we? What's that?" came Riltana's voice. She stepped clear of the circle, her gaze fastened on the funerary island. A moment later Chant flickered into view. His eyes widened at the panorama.

"Is that your tomb?" said the thief. "I mean, the tomb of your last . . . self?"

"I suppose it must be," he replied. "Except it looks grand enough to be some fallen necropolis. Thousands must be interred there. . . ."

Necropolis of Khalusk

Khalusk is a buried crypt city forgotten by most of Faerûn. Exuding an air of decay and necrotic ill will, the necropolis encrusts an island located deep within a subterranean vault, surrounded by the overflow from a sunless sea.

Finding and accessing Khalusk is difficult; the city was constructed by paranoid Netherese arcanists to serve as a secret sanctuary. Nevertheless, Khalusk has seen occasional visitors over the last several hundred years—adventurers, lured by references to the city in ancient texts, who availed themselves of approaches created by natural earth movements or tunnels dug by Underdark miners.

History

The ancient civilization of Illusk persists as little more than crumbled fortifications and shattered towers scattered throughout the city of Luskan. In -354 DR, the same year the Netherese arcanist Melathlar sacrificed himself to erect the Hosttower of the Arcane on the surface, his elder sister Khaela founded a secret subterranean colony to the northeast, hoping that it would prove a final hidden redoubt against the onslaught of the phaerimms—evil aberrant mages bent on the destruction of all life in Faerûn.

For many years the colony thrived, thanks to the magical expertise of Khaela and her children. It was not to last: As Khaela's long life threatened to fail, she fell into madness and began to fear divine magic. Her anxiety drove her to seek the aid of outlaw clerics and other divine casters to keep the gods from learning of her secret stronghold.

With her health and mental stability eroding, Khaela resorted to necromancy. After drinking from a dark cup called the Bleak Grail, she entered undeath. Unfortunately for the rest of Khalusk, because Khaela's magic was inextricably tied to the city and its populace, the effects were felt by all. Within a single hour, every living creature in Khalusk died. Three days later, they rose again, undead.

That was two thousand years ago.

The Vault

The necropolis of Khalusk has a simple layout: A great gulf of dark water surrounds the lone island on which the city rests.

A damp, cool breeze, smelling of earth, swirls around the perimeter of the immense chamber. Along the vault's edge, small caves and fissures above

DEMASCUS AND THE NECROPOLIS

The deva Demascus keeps his modified mausoleum in a lost colony of Illusk beneath Faerûn. An earlier incarnation of Demascus bargained with the undead lords of the necropolis for a secret place of rest. If Demascus's incarnations are slain, they re-form inside the sarcophagus there.

Demascus's connection to his mausoleum in Khalusk has apparently been disrupted, because his present incarnation re-formed in Akanûl, a nation far to the southeast.

the waterline provide vantage points overlooking Khalusk. The island is made dimly visible by the luminescent fungi and faded magical runes lining the wide catacomb mouths along its edge. The fallen remains of the necropolis's ancient majesty loom over its entrances like a crown of broken spires.

Near the overlooks, a bank of pocked black rocks provides access down to the water's edge. There, a collection of watercraft of varying design and complexity lies pulled up on the shore.

The boats are kept in passable repair by a golem named Tharbas, Khalusk's ferryman and guard. Constructed mostly of goliath parts, the golem is authorized to grant or prohibit visitors the use of a boat.

Sea of Khalusk

Ice-cold water surrounds the island, filling the cavern to unknown depths. Wavelets ripple across its surface, driven by the ceaseless wind circling the vast chamber.

A population of undead fish and other aquatic creatures swim the chill sea (nothing escaped the necromantic effects of the Bleak Grail). However, the real threat to visitors is the murder of undead crows that occasionally flies from one of the island's cave mouths to fill the air above the water.

Crossing the water in a boat with oars requires seven rounds of hard rowing. To progress, one character per boat must succeed on a DC 25 Athletics check or a DC 25 Endurance check each round. Alternatively, two characters can succeed on DC 17 Athletics checks or DC 17 Endurance checks each round (both checks must use the same skill, however).

The crows appear on a d20 roll of 1–10, or if summoned by Tharbas, and attack any living creature on the water. The flock cannot be destroyed, but it can be driven off briefly if the characters deal

USING THARBAS

Tharbas takes his duties seriously, and he will deny boat access to any creature or group that he doesn't like or that he judges to be a danger to Khalusk. On the other hand, enough coin will convince the dour golem to show visitors to a serviceable boat. He will not ferry the party members and, depending on his mood and attitude toward them, he might neglect to mention the water's dangers, such as the undead crows that sometimes patrol the air above the dark waves.

enough damage to its members. The only way to escape the crows' harassment, however, is to cross to either shore.

Murder of Crows	**Level 9 Hazard**
Terrain	XP 400
Detect Perception DC 5	**Initiative** +7
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic	
Resist half damage from ranged and melee attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant, 10 against close and area attacks	
Standard Action	
ǂ **Deathless Talons** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee special (creatures on the sea); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 10 necrotic damage.	
Special: On its initiative count, the murder of crows makes the above attack against each living creature on the Sea of Khalusk.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Drive Off:** If the murder of crows takes 100 damage, it breaks off its attack for 2d10 rounds, after which the crows descend and resume attacking. There is no limit to the number of times the crows can attack or be driven off.	

Island Cliffs

Anyone crossing the water to the island must choose between two routes to the necropolis: the gaping catacomb mouths or the steep cliff faces. Scrutinizing the rock walls (Perception DC 20) reveals a few sets of narrow, rambling stairs offering easier ascent to the island surface. Adventurers can also scale the walls by succeeding on a DC 20 Athletics check.

Island Cave Mouths

The wide cave mouths surrounding the island were created by Khaela as part of the city's magical defenses. If Khalusk were ever attacked, the holes could expel great gouts of water that would strike with the force of battering rams. These fountains of fluid would scour the air of enemies, then rain down on the waters below, generating enough turbulence to repeatedly smash any creature or craft into the sea floor.

The Lords of Khalusk have lost the command phrase that triggers this effect, although each hopes to recover it to use against the others if circumstances ever warrant doing so. Following their abandonment as weapons, the caves have been claimed as roosts by the undead crows.

The Necropolis

Looking inward from the edge of the island, visitors see a jumble of smashed gravestones, tilted memorial spires, rusted plaques, and half-collapsed mausoleums. Here and there, larger structures—great walls, arches, and spires—reach toward the cavern's vaulted ceiling. In the streets, corporeal undead shamble and stumble. Sharp-eyed observers might notice that a few move with a purpose and alacrity not shown by their simple-minded compatriots.

Although many undead citizens are mindless, most retain some memory of their original lives, and quite a few remain as acute today as they were before being plunged into undeath. The smartest and most ambitious undead are the so-called lords of Khalusk (see below).

BLENDING IN

Quick-talking characters can convince an undead denizen to act as their guide, but it won't be easy (Diplomacy DC 25). City dwellers that aren't overcome by the desire to eat party members will nevertheless suspect that the characters are either phaerimm spies or thieves here to disturb the Mausoleum of the Sword (which the undead have agreed to guard). Finding a guide will help the characters blend in among the undead.

Characters might try to disguise themselves as undead (Bluff DC 20). Coating themselves in rotting remains so that they don't smell alive offers the best chance of success (+2 to the Bluff check) and of traveling through the city with the fewest difficulties.

Columbarium-Guarded Lanes

Many of the necropolis's cobbled streets are lined with crumbling columbarium$ walls. Within these rotting ramparts stand urns in dark niches. Other burial vases lie shattered and strewn across the way, ashes spilling from their mouths.

Walking these lanes can be dangerous for living creatures, with or without a guide. Wraiths haunt the urns containing the remains of their former bodies. The luckless soul who disturbs these restless apparitions has two options: destroy them, or flee the island. The former choice, assuming it is possible, will draw additional unwanted attention from the Khalusk natives.

Lords of Khalusk

Several "lords"—undead that have enough power and allies to claim the title—hold sway in the necropolis. No official charter defines rules for governing the city or resolving disputes; when the lords quarrel, the argument is decided using swords and spells of exorcism.

Characters who impress a lord or agree to do a job for that individual might receive a token that grants them, for a brief period, permission to travel the city unmolested by the dead. But because the lords of Khalusk are not big on cooperation, carrying the token of a particular lord granting safe passage does not guarantee one's safety where the other lords are involved.

Although the number of lords fluctuates, more than twenty typically vie for control. A few named lords and their interests are described below.

Turam the Cold: A layer of ice sheathes Turam's skeletal body, except for his head, which burns with a chilling black flame. A court of freeze-dried ghouls serves the frigid noble. In exchange for the warmth of a living soul, Turam will grant one favor.

The Arcanist: This ghostly female has no court and manifests infrequently. She wields impressive magical abilities, however, and some whisper that she is the shade of Khaela herself. The Arcanist aids those who reveal a secret to her—but if she judges the secret to be worthless, she claims a life instead.

Lord Ralmarth: This bulky golem, composed of equal parts flesh and stone debris, insists on being addressed as "Lord." Ralmarth patrols the city with his golem-hounds, which, like him, are rough assemblages of rubble and reanimated flesh. Deeply paranoid, he assumes that every visitor is a phaerimm spy.

Doryx: A tinted glass jar, three feet in diameter and five feet tall, holds the pickled, animated remains of the alchemist Doryx. Foreseeing that Khaela's sip from the Bleak Grail would end in disaster, he attempted to preserve himself, but was only partially successful: Doryx is not undead in the traditional sense, but the alchemical soup that keeps him active and thinking is certainly not natural, nor has it preserved his sanity. His court consists of homunculi and constructs, because he detests the undead. Doryx is a determined enemy of the Arcanist (whom he believes to be Khaela's ghost), and he seeks the location of the Bleak Grail, which he hopes can reverse the city's devastation.

Mausoleum of the Sword

The most direct way into Demascus's secret redoubt lies in a plaza separated from the surrounding gravestones by black iron rails. Climbing through a hole in the cobbles at the plaza's center drops visitors into the main chamber of the mausoleum.

GUARDED MAUSOLEUM

Demascus's arrangement with the Lords of Khalusk stipulates that the entire island city will guard his mausoleum's location from intruders. Adventurers could slip into the mausoleum, however, despite the numerous undead patrolling the necropolis. Such sneaky visitors would find the mausoleum unguarded—but not free of perils.

One of Demascus's foes has set a magical sensor in the chamber. Inscribed among the countless symbols on the sarcophagus, it is nearly impossible to notice (Perception DC 30). If the lid is moved, a rakshasa assassin appears 1d4 rounds later and attempts to kill Demascus or any intruders it finds. It approaches its task subtly, using deceptive veil to assume the appearance of a humanoid in need of aid. Once the target's guard is down, the assassin strikes.

The tomb is tiled in black stone and magically lit by four iron candelabra, one in each corner. A shallow pool with fish skeletons scattered across its bottom dominates the floor. A tunnel exits the chamber at one end of the pool. On the opposite end lies an enormous sarcophagus.

Layer upon layer of designs cover the sarcophagus, with newer symbols overlaying older carvings. Gauntlets, shields, leaves, orbs, eyes, stars, anvils, skulls, and moons stand out among the motifs—known symbols of the gods of Faerûn, both current and past. Other markings evoke no set meaning in Toril, for they are symbols of the gods of other worlds.

These words are inscribed on the stone face of the sarcophagus: "Agent of Fate, Emissary of Divine Judgment, Cutter of Destiny's Thread. You died as you lived, and you will live again, Demascus, Sword of the Gods."

The sarcophagus usually lies empty. Every so often, however, the regenerating body of Demascus appears in it as a not-quite corpse; rotting in reverse, it becomes more and more alive until, at last, the deva's new incarnation steps forth.

When Demascus appears, so do his implements: a greatsword called Exorcessum, bedecked with red runes down one side and white runes down the other; a collection of small charms; and a long, animated scarf known as the Veil of Wrath and Knowledge. A ring called the Whorl of Ioun, Demascus's main continuity bridge between incarnations, also manifests.

Demascus can channel incredible power from these implements. In the hands of another (such as someone who manages to pilfer them from the mausoleum before the deva's latest incarnation opens his eyes), these magic items are potent, if less so. Treat them as noted below.

Exorcessum: *+3 luck blade*

Veil of Wrath and Knowledge: *+3 amulet of protection*

Scroll-Shaped Charm: *headband of perception* (level 11, substitute Insight for Perception)

Whorl of Ioun: *premonition ring*

About the Author

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Creature Incarnations: They Creep

By Scott Gable

Illustrations by Christopher Burdett

You can't see them right now, but below us, way down underground, a colony of bugs exists. Don't laugh so quickly. These creatures are an entirely different breed from the bugs you know.

—Skaldrien, dwarf scholar

Ruin scarabs are enormous beetles, ranging in size from that of large dogs to elder dragons. They're not overly aggressive, but they don't make good neighbors because they require enormous underground complexes. They constantly dig, and as a result of the digging, those areas they call home are plagued by earthquakes, landslides, and sinkholes.

Ruin scarabs don't live near civilization often because they need access to great quantities of dung. More often, ruin scarab colonies are found in out-of-the-way places with just the right conditions, such as some of the larger subterranean ecosystems, isolated surface locations with plentiful megafauna, and similar areas where large quantities of dung is readily available.

Each variety of creature has a particular role in the colony. Some collect dung, some dig tunnels, and some stand guard. Perhaps more interesting, ruin scarabs keep evolving faster than most other creatures, and new varieties frequently emerge. These varieties don't all find a foothold, which causes evolution to pass them by, but sometimes, the right ruin scarab exists for a particular job.

Though variation makes it hard to know what to expect in a ruin scarab colony, the creatures have a few common features. They all share the basic appearance of giant scarab beetles: some have horns, some have overgrown mandibles, some curl into armored balls. Nobody, however, has seen one that can fly. They have wings, but those appendages are locked away behind a pair of fused forewings, or elytra—the hard shell that can protect a beetle's wings. They make up for this lack of mobility, though, by being capable burrowers. They can also make creative use of their locked-away wings by beating them rapidly, causing thunderous sounds and forceful blasts of air to come from beneath their carapaces. This latter motion can propel them forward at high velocity, enabling a more directed attack using the funneled air to slam and push back foes. Most ruin scarabs are immune to difficult terrain and to sound to some degree, but that makes sense when every day is an earthquake for them.

They might seem an odd assortment of creatures or a quirk of nature, but ruin scarabs have proven immensely successful. A large part of that success is their machinelike interaction. Each has a job to do, and it's for the good of the colony that it gets done. What care do they have for inconvenienced neighbors when they have starving grubs to feed?

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Ruin Scarab Grub

Driven solely by hunger, ruin scarab grubs tunnel through dung constantly. The dung is everything to them—food and shelter—and until the grubs mature into adult ruin scarabs, they know nothing else. They are not particularly fussy in their dietary needs, and attempt to devour any flesh placed in front of them, whether living or dead. Any creature that comes near their dung pits is in terrible danger.

Tactics

Attempting to feed, they fearlessly press the attack, viciously flailing and tearing with *boring maw*. Nothing short of forceful removal or death stops their assault. Their *splatter* makes them problematic even in death.

Lore

Nature DC 10: No two kinds of dung are the same. Ruin scarab grubs react differently to different kinds of dung at varying stages in their lives. The sheer complexity of ruin scarab grub husbandry has ensured that intelligent creatures that try to raise their own ruin scarabs from grubs, whether for commercial or personal use, are few and far between. Without the proper and complete care of a ruin scarab colony, the grubs typically die or become uncontrollably violent.

Nature DC 15: Even in the dung pits of ruin scarab colonies, it is unclear why one grub, otherwise identical to the others, matures into a collider while the next becomes a cataclysm. Presumably, the cause is tiny differences in the dung's acidity, nutrients, temperature, and a multitude of other factors. In this sense, the caretaker weevils are the true hidden masters of the ruin scarabs.

Nature DC 22: The more exotic types of dung and dung blends can trigger unexpected responses in the grubs. Dung from more magical sources, such as dragons, has led to new adult forms of ruin scarabs. As a species, ruin scarabs keep evolving, and apparently, it's all because of the dung.

Ruin Scarab Grub	**Level 5 Minion Brute**
Small natural beast	XP 50
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +3
AC 17, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17	**Perception** +3
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 4	Darkvision
Traits	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Boring Maw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage, or 10 against a bloodied target.	
Triggered Actions	
Splatter ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The grub drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The target is blinded until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Stealth +8	
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 9 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Ruin Scarab Collider

The grubs require a constant supply of fresh dung, and the duty of collecting it falls on the ruin scarab colliders. These fast-moving creatures range far and wide in search of high-quality dung. Incredibly focused and single-minded, they have an incredible knack for finding it. When they find a suitably fresh and copious sampling, they sculpt and mold it into large dung balls, and they roll them home. Each expertly pilots its own dung ball, moving in reverse as it pushes the ball along with its rear legs. Not slowed down by the ball in the slightest, they make excellent time as they return with this fresh bounty to the hungry grubs.

When back in the colony, the colliders add the fresh dung to the dung pits. They roll the dung ball onto the surface of the pits; the voracious grubs incessantly churn the dung, and the balls are rapidly broken down. The colliders do, however, regularly monitor the integrity of the pit's berms and groom its surface. Caretaker weevils attend to any remaining care required for the grubs and dung pits.

Unlike most ruin scarabs, colliders have a more flexible carapace, which allows them to curl up into rigid balls. This form permits them greatly improved fortification and mobility.

Ruin Scarab Collider	**Level 7 Skirmisher**
Small natural beast	XP 300
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40	**Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 4	Darkvision
Resist 5 thunder	
Traits	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Mandibles** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.	
↓ **Dung Charge** ✦ **Recharge** if the attack misses	
Effect: The scarab shifts up to its speed and then makes the following attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 4d6 + 4 damage. The scarab can push the target 1 square, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
↓ **Rolling Ruin** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The scarab shifts up to its speed and makes the following attack at any point during the shift.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.	
Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 4 (+0) **Cha** 11 (+3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Tactics

When out scavenging for dung, ruin scarab colliders typically ignore others. They have a job to do, and as long as they're allowed to do it, they do it. Any who interfere with that job, however, or prove a threat to the safety of the grubs or the integrity of the dung pits are attacked without pause. Any colliders returning with dung balls won't hesitate to use *dung charge*. That option exhausted, they curl up using *rolling ruin* and careen through enemies.

Lore

Nature DC 23: Ruin scarab colliders go where the dung is, and that takes them into dangerous areas. Fearlessly, they navigate though locales infested with giant, powerful creatures and through those creatures' lairs—all to get dung. Sure, the colliders occasionally are attacked, but these scavengers have a surprisingly high survival rate since most creatures ignore them—if not silently thank them. Colliders have been known to frequent dragon lairs.

Ruin Scarab Carver

A ruin scarab colony's caverns don't dig themselves. Many thousands of tons of soil must be moved over a colony's lifetime. Ruin scarab carvers perform much of this work. They clear out miles of cavern, giving the colony room to grow. But this can be dangerous work: They could tunnel right into the lair of a dangerous creature or into hazardous terrain, so the carvers must be capable warriors.

In fact, they also serve as the colony's rapid response units. These highly mobile ruin scarabs are vicious fighters and typically stand as a colony's primary guards. They rotate between guard duties and digging duties since the constant digging can put excessive stress on their mandibles. They are seen standing guard, motionless and alert, at entrances and key throughways within the colony. They also accompany collider scavenging parties as guards. They're easily recognized because they stand upright, like prairie dogs, to watch for trouble while the colliders gather dung.

Their cleaverlike mandibles are large and sharp, setting them apart from other ruin scarabs. The mandibles have a wide range of motion, surpassing that of other ruin scarabs and allowing them superior control and versatility—perfect for either excavating the soil or disemboweling their foes.

Tactics

Ruin scarab carvers always work in pairs or small packs, whether digging or standing guard within the colony or accompanying a scavenging party. They maintain this tactic on the battlefield, weaving in and out of combatants and ganging up on enemies, making optimal use of *retribution*. When engaged, they attack freely, using *carving mandibles* to knock foes prone before proceeding to eviscerate them using *grievous assault*. When within their colony, they fight intruders to the death. If acting as escorts to a scavenging party, they hold off the enemy as long as they

can while the colliders retreat if possible. Burrowing to freedom is always an option in the face of overwhelming forces.

Lore

Nature DC 17: Though the ruin scarab cataclysms are held as the glorious earthmovers of ruin scarab colonies, for the day to day requirements of maturing colonies, the bulk of the digging is performed by the carvers.

Ruin Scarab Carver	**Level 9 Soldier**
Medium natural beast	XP 400
HP 97; **Bloodied** 48	**Initiative** +10
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	**Perception** +7
Speed 7, burrow 4 (tunneling), climb 6	Darkvision
Resist 5 thunder	
Traits	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Carving Mandibles ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⸸ **Grievous Assault ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Triggered Actions	
Retribution ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the scarab uses an attack power that doesn't include the scarab as a target.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The scarab uses *carving mandibles* against the triggering enemy.	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 17 (+7)	
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 4 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Ruin Scarab Dreadnought

The brunt of a colony's safety falls to the ruin scarab dreadnoughts. Of all the ruin scarabs, the dreadnoughts are the only ones known to be solely devoted to combat. They spend all their time patrolling the colony, and they venture outside the colony only to repel invaders or to partake in other important military options.

Unlike other ruin scarabs, dreadnoughts have three horns. One short, blunted horn protrudes from the nose and points forward, and two long, razor-sharp horns jut forward past the nose from just above the eyes. These horns are used solely for dispatching enemies.

Tactics

Ruin scarab dreadnoughts focus on one enemy, typically the first they see. Though they are slow, lumbering beasts, when they sight an enemy, they rocket forward using *ballistic assault*. When swamped by enemies, they use *eruption* to provide room to move and set up *ballistic assault*. These remorseless creatures use *no survivors* to overtake those that flee, although they might forego doing this if they are currently engaged with another enemy.

Lore

Nature DC 28: Ruin scarab dreadnoughts are the most commonly encountered kind of ruin scarab that makes constructive use of the creatures' seemingly useless wings. Beating ferociously within their armored forewing prison, a dreadnought's wings create tremendous force that the scarabs can vent either backward to give them a tremendous boost to their forward momentum or forward to blast the ground in front of them and send foes and debris flying.

Ruin Scarab Dreadnought	**Level 13 Elite Soldier**
Large natural beast	XP 1,600
HP 264; **Bloodied** 132	**Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25	**Perception** +10
Speed 6, climb 2	Darkvision
Resist 10 thunder	
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Gore ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage.	
⸸ **Ballistic Assault ✦ At-Will**	
Effect: The scarab moves up to 4 squares and then makes the following attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d12 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Minor Actions	
⇜ **Eruption ✦ At-Will** (1/round)	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +16 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Triggered Actions	
No Survivors ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the scarab moves more than 2 squares away from the scarab.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The scarab uses *ballistic assault* against the triggering enemy.	
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+10)	
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 16 (+9)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Ruin Scarab Regulator

Ruin scarab colonies run nearly flawlessly on sheer instinct. But sometimes, especially during times of stress, a little oversight can go a long way. That's where the ruin scarab regulators come in. These smaller ruin scarabs act both as communicators, wordlessly coordinating their allies in battle, and as propagandists and puppet masters, controlling enemy actions and subverting their perceptions.

The regulator stands out from other ruin scarabs by being nondescript. This quality is how it can keep a low profile when invaders are present.

Tactics

Ruin scarab regulators don't waste any time in a fight. They immediately attempt to dominate a foe by using *lifting the veil*, and they follow that up with *over the edge* as soon as an ally is in an ideal position to benefit from it. Though it needs to stay away from melee combat, it has to stay close enough to make use of *overseer*, so when the enemy inevitably gets too close, it uses *sensory deprivation* to best effect.

Lore

Nature DC 22: Ruin scarab regulators have some measure of control over other ruin scarabs in that they can temporarily boost their allies' abilities, making them work harder, longer, and faster. Although granting these abilities has obvious benefits in battle, regulators also occasionally use them outside battle. However, long-term use of this ability has detrimental effects on those so boosted: undue physical stress from overexertion, potentially leading to premature death. This isn't good for the colony as a whole; under certain circumstances, though, the risk is considered worth it, such as during the earliest days of a new colony when growth is vital.

Nature DC 30: Ruin scarab regulators are intelligent enough to use their psychic abilities to enter simple negotiations with other creatures. By conveying the appropriate emotions and images, they have struck many deals to better the colony. Doing so typically involves convincing other creatures that it's in their best interest to ally with the ruin scarabs, whether out of a desire for mutual protection or another incentive.

Ruin Scarab Regulator	**Level 15 Controller (Leader)**
Small natural beast	XP 1,200
HP 145; **Bloodied** 72	**Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28	**Perception** +12
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 6	Darkvision
Traits	
☼ **Overseer** ✦ **Aura** 5	
While in the aura, allies don't grant combat advantage by being flanked.	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
Static Screen (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +18 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d10 + 6 psychic damage, and the scarab slides the target up to 2 squares.	
Lifting the Veil (psychic) ✦ **Recharge** if the attack misses	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +18 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d10 + 13 psychic damage, and the target is dominated (save ends). While in the scarab's overseer aura, the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against this effect.	
Sensory Deprivation (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +18 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is blinded and deafened until the end of the scarab's next turn.	
Over the Edge ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Effect: One ally within 5 squares of the scarab can charge or make a basic attack as a free action	
Str 14 (+9) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 20 (+12)	
Con 17 (+10) **Int** 8 (+6) **Cha** 23 (+13)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Ruin Scarab Cataclysm

Cataclysms have the least to do in a colony. Sure, they are extremely important earthmovers early on, when much dirt and rock needs to be moved as quickly as possible. But other than that, they have little to do until they are called upon to serve as the last line of defense for the colony.

Except for one of them. One cataclysm in a colony—and even the largest colonies typically have no more than three at a time—is always the egg bearer, which is effectively the queen. If the queen perishes, another cataclysm spontaneously becomes queen and starts producing eggs without missing a beat. Each month, the queen lays a clutch of eggs (12–24 at a time), which are tended to in shallow pools of dung off the main dung pits. The queen has no other duties.

Tactics

Too big and lumbering to do well with tactics, ruin scarab cataclysms wade into battle and seeks to have as many foes near it as possible so that it can use *aftershock* to best effect and unleash *focused reverberation* when the opportunity presents itself. If foes are harrying it excessively or if it needs to position opponents for other attacks, it makes use of *wind wave*. A cataclysm becomes the centerpiece of a battle.

Lore

Nature DC 23: Due to their sheer size, ruin scarab cataclysms can displace an enormous quantity of earth quickly, but they perform little of a colony's digging chores. They typically start the larger rooms and tunnels, and in the early days of a colony when colony growth is most vital, they are irreplaceable. Carvers do the daily digging chores.

Nature DC 31: A ruin scarab cataclysm rarely leaves its colony. It's believed that when it does, it won't ever go back. It's not clear whether this is a

Ruin Scarab Cataclysm **Level 17 Solo Brute**
Huge natural beast XP 8,000

HP 672; **Bloodied** 336 **Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29 **Perception** +13
Speed 6, burrow 2 (tunneling) Darkvision
Immune dominated, stunned; **Resist** 15 thunder
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Earthshaker (thunder) ✦ **Aura** 3
While in the aura, squares of ground become difficult terrain. While the scarab is bloodied, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 thunder damage.

Demolition
The scarab deals 2d10 extra damage against objects and structures.

Unstoppable
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.

Standard Actions

Crushing Mandibles ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 15 damage, and the target falls prone.

Aftershock ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: The scarab moves up to its speed and can move through enemy spaces. The first time it enters each enemy's space during the move, it makes the following attack against that enemy.
Attack: Melee 0 (one enemy); +20 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d10 + 13 damage.

Focused Reverberation (thunder) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 7 thunder damage, and the target is dazed and deafened (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the scarab's next turn.

Minor Actions

Wind Wave ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 9 damage, and the scarab pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Reflective Carapace ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the scarab misses it with an area or a ranged attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The triggering enemy must use the attack against itself.

Str 22 (+14)	**Dex** 18 (+12)	**Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 24 (+15)	**Int** 4 (+5)	**Cha** 15 (+10)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

determined choice of the cataclysm, perhaps heading off to die, or if it gets lost or distracted. Either way, a cataclysm outside its colony is a big deal—no matter why it's there.

Ruin Scarab Allies

Many creatures, especially other giant insects, depend on or interact with ruin scarabs. Some have a symbiotic relationship with a colony. Others are opportunistic creatures.

Many such allies are aquatic. Ruin scarab colonies nearly always contain a large body of water somewhere within its boundaries. This is at least partly by design; the tunnels' natural tendency is to funnel runoff to a low point, and the ruin scarabs optimize this for their own needs. This water then becomes an important niche for other creatures.

Caretaker Weevil

Taking care of the grubs, caretaker weevils are a valuable part of ruin scarab colonies. They constantly monitor the dung pits—tasting it for freshness, adjusting the acidity, adjusting the temperature—and tending to the grubs' every need.

Tactics

Staying near the dung pits to protect the grubs, caretaker weevils take up a position of safety on a wall or the ceiling. They lock down targets to a particular area using *glob of glue*, trying to set up optimal opportunities to use *dissolving spittle*. If the grubs are getting beaten, it won't hesitate to use *soothing salve* on them. For those enemies that decide to come after it by climbing, it uses *slick surface*.

Lore

Nature DC 26: Caretaker weevils are essential to the proper functioning of a ruin scarab colony. They're not ruin scarabs, but the colony would be nothing without their aid.

Caretaker Weevil	Level 10 Artillery (Leader)
Medium natural beast	XP 500
HP 84; **Bloodied** 42	**Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	**Perception** +14
Speed 6, climb 4 (spider climb)	Darkvision
Resist 10 acid	
Standard Actions	
Dissolving Spittle (acid) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).	
Glob of Glue (acid) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d4 + 3 acid damage, and the target is restrained until the end of the weevil's next turn.	
Soothing Salve ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Each ally in a close blast 3 gains 10 temporary hit points and can make a saving throw.	
Minor Actions	
Slick Surface (zone) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The weevil creates a zone in an area burst 1 within 10 squares that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature falls prone if it lacks a climb speed and ends its turn in the zone.	
Str 15 (+7) **Dex** 24 (+12) **Wis** 18 (+9)	
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+6)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Conniption Bug

These insects are nuisances in many locales and are extremely common in ruin scarab colonies.

Tactics

Conniption bugs attack on sight, swarming their opponents and attacking en masse.

Lore

Nature DC 16: Cutting off a conniption bug's head, or killing it in any other way, triggers its viselike mandibles to snap shut and lock. This terrible, final bite is painful and difficult to dislodge. Killing them can make real killers out of these nuisances.

Conniption Bug	Level 8 Minion Soldier
Small natural beast (aquatic)	XP 88
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20	**Perception** +7
Speed 6, climb 6, swim 6	Darkvision
Traits	
Aquatic	
The bug can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Overwhelming	
When it attacks, the bug deals 1 extra damage for each additional conniption bug adjacent to its target.	
Standard Actions	
Bite ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Death Vice ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The bug drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (No Action): Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: Ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+7)	
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 4 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Desolation Bug

Desolation bugs quietly await their prey, whether in the water or nearby. When prey is close enough, the bug shoots out its lower jaw at lightning speed, viciously grabbing at prey and pulling it into its maw.

Tactics

Desolation bugs rely primarily on *devil's tongue*. However, if prey brings the fight to it, *churned mud* provides an opportunity to set up better attacks or to retreat.

Lore

Nature DC 28: The desolation bug is a giant, mutated version of a dragonfly nymph. Whatever caused it to grow that big also broke its normal life cycle: It won't become a giant dragonfly.

Desolation Bug	Level 12 Lurker
Large natural beast (aquatic)	XP 700
HP 97; **Bloodied** 48	**Initiative** +16
AC 26, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23	**Perception** +14
Speed 6, swim 6	Darkvision
Traits	
Aquatic	
The beetle can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Standard Actions	
Devil's Maw ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage.	
Churned Mud ✦ **Recharge** when the bug uses *devil's tongue*	
Effect: The bug becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until immediately after it attacks.	
Devil's Tongue ✦ **Recharge** when the bug uses *churned mud*	
Requirement: The bug must be invisible.	
Attack: Melee 6 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d12 + 15 damage, and the bug pulls the target up to 5 squares. The target is then grabbed (escape DC 20) until the end of the bug's next turn.	
Sustain Standard: The grab persists until the end of the bug's next turn, and the target takes 3d10 + 6 damage.	
Skills Stealth +17	
Str 16 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+9)	
Con 19 (+10) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 13 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Diving Beetle

Primarily docile, diving beetles thrive near ruin scarab colonies by staying out of the way. The deep pools of water scattered throughout ruin scarab colonies are ideal for them.

Tactics

Diving beetles aren't interested in fighting. They use *bubble cloud* as needed to get away.

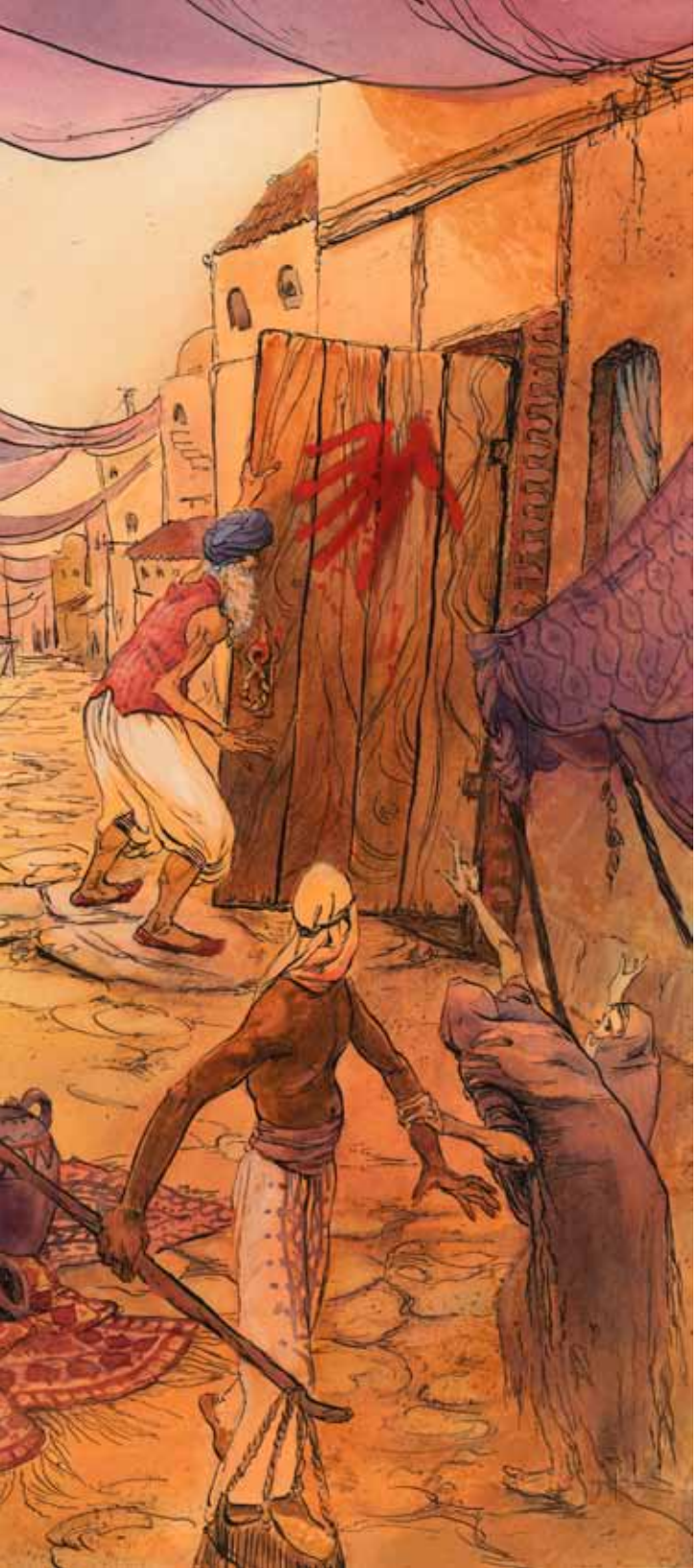
Lore

Nature DC 20: Diving beetles create a bubble of air around themselves when they dive. Suitable as a mount, the diving beetle can extend its air bubble around a rider, which allows that individual to breathe freely underwater as long as he or she stays mounted.

Diving Beetle	**Level 12 Controller**
Large natural beast (aquatic, mount)	XP 700
HP 120; **Bloodied** 60	**Initiative** +10
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24	**Perception** +15
Speed 4, swim 8	Darkvision
Traits	
Air Bubble (mount)	
While the beetle has a friendly rider of 12th level or higher mounted on it, the rider has the aquatic trait.	
Aquatic	
The beetle can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.	
Effect: The beetle slides the target up to 2 squares.	
⇙ **Bubble Cloud** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and the beetle pushes the target up to 3 squares.	
Str 13 (+7) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+10)	
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 15 (+8)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

About the Author

Scott Gable is a freelance editor and game designer. He currently edits for Open Design's award-winning *Kobold Quarterly* magazine, website, and patron projects, including *Courts of the Shadow Fey* and *Tales of the Old Margreve*. His most recent game design is for Zombie Sky Press, including *The Faerie Ring*. He calls the beautiful underwater city of Seattle his home.



DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Six-Fingered Sign

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Bernadette Carstensen

The people of Athas are no strangers to hardship; their world threatens daily to burn out their lives. Yet these stout souls harbor fear, superstition, and paranoia, especially during the appearance of the six-fingered sign—a symbol that can cast whole city-states into turmoil.

The icon, which resembles an oversized, six-fingered hand, shows up scratched into doors, burned onto walls, or drawn in the sands of Athas. When painted, it is yellow or black. No one would ever claim to know where the six-fingered sign comes from, and anyone caught drawing the symbol would be castigated for inviting bad luck. Consequently, the six-fingered sign has a reputation for appearing mysteriously, as a portent of supernatural forces heralding approaching disaster, both natural and supernatural.

The six-fingered sign is one of the few superstitions that recur throughout the varied cultures of the city-states, and most denizens of the Tyr Region recognize it as a bad omen. For some, it is a warning, urging them to take action in hopes of avoiding calamity. For others, it is an indicator that it is already too late: The community has been marked for disaster.

Those who believe that salvation is still possible will attempt to divine how to avert the coming disaster. Some make offerings or sacrifices to their deified sorcerer-kings; others embark on violent rampages or stir up riots, interpreting the sign to mean that they must drive out or slay a person or group to stave off calamity.

Despite its commonly held supernatural origins, the sign is frequently the work of more mundane troublemakers. A disgruntled shopkeeper might scrawl it on a competitor's door and then incite a mob to "deal with" the rival "before danger strikes." A templar might pay agents to paint it on the walls of a suspected Veiled Alliance haven, ensuring that no bystanders will interfere when he or she raids the place. It is sometimes painted on the tents of dune-traders who cheat their customers, carved into the sides of slavers' caged wagons, or burned into the doors of recently arrived travelers believed to have brought trouble with them.

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Origins of the Six-Fingered Sign

The mark that commoners scrawl into the walls of their enemies' homes is a pale echo of the potent and rare glyph that it imitates. Only the sorcerer-kings know the sign's true origins, and they dare not let that knowledge spread.

Long ago, when the sorcerer-kings were still solidifying control of their city-states, a powerful preserver from Balic named Balodoro stood against the defiling tyrants. So great was the threat posed by the preserver that the sorcerer-kings set their squabbles aside and briefly united to destroy him. Upon his death, the preserver uttered a powerful curse upon his enemies, saying that his hand would reach forward through time, and that everything it touched would be purged from the world by his vengeance.

Balodoro's words are long forgotten, and the magic he used to cast his curse has dwindled; yet, its embers occasionally fan to flame once again. When they do, a true six-fingered sign appears.

Rumored Appearances

The true six-fingered sign—the remnant of Balodoro's revenge—has appeared several times over the last few centuries. Each time, it brought destruction and death, or madness and chaos. Below are two stories about the six-fingered sign and the disasters associated with its presence.

Templar Thakok-An of Kalidnay attempted to aid her sorcerer-king, Kalid-Ma, in his transformation ritual by using a ceremony from his forbidden texts. Preparing to sacrifice her family atop his ziggurat, she drew the six-fingered sign on each of their foreheads, as the texts instructed. Later, after the ensuing calamity had marooned Kalidnay in the Gray, Thakok-An searched the texts to discover what had gone wrong—and was shocked to find that the six-fingered sign appeared nowhere within.

It is said that in the days before the mad king Daskinor closed the gates of Eldaarich, a strange rider came to the city, demanding (and, surprisingly, obtaining) an audience with the sorcerer-king. During the interview, the rider handed Daskinor a scroll bearing the six-fingered sign. The sorcerer-king sealed the city a few days later.

Mark of Six Fingers

Few are foolish enough to tattoo the six-fingered sign on their bodies. Indeed, most tattooists refuse to ink the symbol on anyone, and those who bear the mark are shunned by society as outcasts or madmen. However, rumors persist of creatures that have awoken to find the six-fingered sign branded or tattooed in their flesh.

Appearances of this *mark of six fingers* herald a supernatural occurrence—perhaps a fragment of Balodoro's curse resurfacing to shape the course of events. Whatever else it might signify, the mark is a sure sign that its bearer will be embroiled in events involving magic—and perhaps not in a good way. Some bearers view the *mark of six fingers* as no better than a death sentence, although a few embrace it as a sign that they are chosen to be a part of important events. In fact, some believe the *mark of six fingers* signifies a sheltering hand, meant to see them through

USING THE SIGN

Because the six-fingered sign is both a superstitious device used by commoners and a symbol of actual power, you can use it in your campaign in a variety of ways. Here are a few examples, ranging from flavor to the basis of entire adventures.

Unwelcome Visitors: The party members, arriving in a city-state for the first time, awaken in the night to the clamor of a mob outside their inn. Someone has scrawled the six-fingered sign on the inn door, and a mob has gathered to put the adventurers out of the city. The characters must defuse the situation and then determine who scrawled the sign, and why that person or people want the party run out of town.

A Warning to Be Heeded: While visiting a city-state, the adventurers discover that the six-fingered sign has appeared on the doors of six houses, each belonging to a templar. When the marked templars begin dying mere days after the signs appear, the sorcerer-king cracks down on the citizens, hoping the brutality will instill sufficient fear in the culprits to deter further attacks on templars. When six-fingered signs appear on the doors of the sorcerer-king's servants, the characters must discover who is using the symbol to mark their victims and decide whether to end their violent campaign or join them in their rebellion.

The True Sign: The adventurers uncover a cache of magic items and other valuables, including a scroll containing the true history of the six-fingered sign and a way to harness its power to bring back Balodoro. The characters must visit sites where the true six-fingered sign has appeared and use the scroll's ritual to draw in the sign's power. Unfortunately for the party, this means finding a way into sealed Eldaarich and discovering a means of traveling safely to and from Kalidnay in the Gray. Once six remnants of his power have been collected, Balodoro—a powerful ally in the fight against any sorcerer-king—is reborn.

upcoming danger. Whatever the truth might be, the mark is the latent power of Balodoro's curse given form, and the powers it grants derive from him. When the danger in question passes, the *mark of six fingers* fades away, leaving no trace.

Mark of Six Fingers Level 6 Rare

Your skin bears the six-fingered sign, a brand showing a hand with six splayed fingers.

Alternative Reward: Echo of Power 1,800 gp
Property: You gain a +4 item bonus to Intimidate checks when the *mark of six fingers* is visible.
Power (Encounter): Minor Action. *Effect:* By placing your hand upon the flat surface of an unattended object, you can brand the six-fingered sign into that surface, whatever its composition.
Power (Daily): No Action. *Trigger:* You roll a natural 1 on an attack roll or a saving throw. *Effect:* Reroll the triggering roll and use the second result. Once before the end of the encounter, you can use a free action to force an enemy within 10 squares of you that you can see to reroll an attack roll (before damage is rolled) and use the second result.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual® 3*, the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands™*, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms™*, and *Monster Vault™*.

Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage

A Dungeons & Dragons® adventure for characters of levels 3-5

By Sterling Hershey

Illustration by William O'Connor

Cartography by Jason A. Engle

Introduction

"Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage" takes place in the mystical swamps of the Witchlight Fens, located in southern central Nentir Vale. There, the Brackmarsh tribe of the Witchlight lizardfolk is expanding its lands, killing its neighbors or driving them from their meager holdings. The tribe's next target is the Witchlight Hermitage, a tiny but significant settlement, which the adventurers must defend from a brutal attack that turns out to be more than a lizardfolk land grab.

This adventure uses the swamp map and the Witchlight Lizardfolk section in *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*™. It mentions the Witchlight Fens'

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self-proclaimed overlord, the black dragon Shadowmire, although the dragon does not appear in the adventure. Although this is a standalone adventure, you can gain more insight into its backstory by reading the appropriate parts of *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*.

You can adapt the adventure for another campaign by dropping the Brackmarsh lizardfolk's affiliation with Shadowmire and treating it as a generic, aggressive clan of lizardfolk.

Adventure Background

The Witchlight Hermitage lies near the Nentir River, along the ever-changing borders of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk tribal lands. It is operated by the cleric Ofeen Nole, a bright light in the gloomy mire who works to counteract the effects of its connections to the Shadowfell and the evil influence exerted by Shadowmire.

At their dragon overlord's behest, the Witchlight lizardfolk tribes have begun aggressively expanding their lands. The largest of these tribes, the Brackmarsh, fearful of losing its privileged status with Shadowmire if it lags behind, is attacking numerous settlements along its borders.

The attacks have disrupted life in the Witchlight Hermitage. Warnings and calls for help ring out across the sparsely populated area, and refugees and victims struggle to stay one step ahead of the pursuing Brackmarsh lizardfolk.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters begin the adventure in the Witchlight Fens, having been drawn to the swamp by another quest or because of the known threat of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk. Early in their travels they come across a messenger speeding downriver, and they learn about the lizardfolk's raid on Treewater and the plight of the refugees from that village. As they travel to meet the refugees, they have a fleeting encounter with some Brackmarsh scouts.

The refugees ask the adventurers to escort them to the Witchlight Hermitage, where they hope to find aid and a means of rescue by way of the waterway that leads away from the place.

When the heroes arrive at the hermitage, they discover that the place has already been attacked, and that its inhabitants have barricaded themselves inside. The characters must convince them to open up and provide aid to the refugees. This task turns out to be easier than anticipated because the hermitage is run by a cleric of Pelor named Ofeen Nole, who willingly grants sanctuary.

Ofeen tells the adventurers that she expects another attack at any time. However, she refuses to abandon the hermitage and asks the characters to help her defend it. The cleric believes that Pelor has led her to this place as a test of faith, and she views the hermitage as a bastion against encroaching evil. With the strength of the characters at her side and the help of able-bodied refugees, she believes that she can hold out, at least until boats arrive to transport the refugees to safety.

While the occupants prepare overnight for battle, a lizardfolk raiding party quietly surrounds the hermitage. The creatures' dawn attack, led by the feared Chak, provides a diversion so that the marsh mystics can uncover the true prize: a circle of stones buried nearby in which the lizardfolk can boost their ability to use fastlights against their enemies.

Refugees and reinforcements arrive throughout the battle. Finally, a small squadron of boats and rafts reaches the nearby landing, prepared to lend a hand and transport the survivors to safety. Whether anyone remains at the hermitage afterward depends on the battle's outcome.

Treewater and Renefik

Although this adventure focuses on the Witchlight Hermitage, characters might decide to go to Treewater or Renefik, or ask for more information about the sites. You can build on the details below and even create a layout of the settlements if the adventurers choose to visit them.

Treewater: A village of about 50 people, mainly humans and half-elves, Treewater has ten buildings, consisting of small dwellings (little better than shacks) and a few stores and storehouses. It stands along the edge of a small, round lake, tied to the larger river by a narrow waterway. Treewater hosts trading days several times a year, when regional residents can buy and sell goods and acquire hard-to-find items.

Renefik: This halfling enclave has a population of 10 Ren Clan members who work the local watercourses as traders and guides. Renefik's neighbors view the halflings as self-serving and a bit greedy, but as far less of a threat than most creatures that dwell in the swamp. The enclave consists of four multistory buildings, with the lowest level serving as an enclosed dock, the second level as a storehouse, and the upper floors as living quarters. The enclave is lightly fortified, which means that it more defensible than most holdings in the area.

Quests

In addition to the rewards the characters can earn in this adventure's encounters, they can glean some additional XP rewards by completing three quests.

QUEST: SAVE THE HERMITAGE

4th-Level Major Quest (875 XP)

To complete the major quest for this adventure, the characters must prevent the hermitage from falling to the lizardfolk.

QUEST: PROTECT THE CLERIC
4th-Level Minor Quest (175 XP)
The characters receive an additional quest reward if Ofeen Nole survives the battle with the lizardfolk so that she can continue her work.

QUEST: SHEPHERD THE FLOCK
4th-Level Minor Quest (175 XP)
Ensuring that most of the refugees make it to the rescue boats at the end of the adventure (or, failing that, escorting them to the Renefik enclave) earns the characters another quest reward.

Getting the Heroes Involved

Here are several ways the characters might become involved in the story.

- The heroes travel to the Witchlight Hermitage to consult with Ofeen on another matter, perhaps seeking local knowledge or religious advice.
- The adventurers are on their way to Treewater for a reason unrelated to this adventure when they encounter refugees from the small village who say that it has been overrun.
- The characters have been hired by other members of Ofeen's faith who fear that the lizardfolk's depredations will put the cleric in harm's way.
- The characters are foes of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk, or of Shadowmire, and are taking the fight to the enemy.

Witchlight Fens Area Lore

A character knows the following information about this region of the Witchlight Fens with a successful History or Nature check.

DC 10: Several lizardfolk tribes in this area have pledged to serve the black dragon.

DC 16: The Brackmarsh lizardfolk rank as Shadowmire's strongest tribe

DC 25: The character is familiar with local settlements, including the Witchlight Hermitage, the village of Treewater, and the enclave of Renefik.

Events

The events that follow tell the story of the adventure as it unfolds. The roleplaying encounters (Events 1, 3, and 4) can be as short or as drawn out as you and your players want them to be.

Event 1. River Rafter

Roleplaying Encounter

As the characters approach or travel along the river early one morning, a human on a raft passes quickly by them. Before the river carries him away, he warns the characters of the rampaging lizardfolk.

Perception DC 14: As the rafter scans the area, clusters of floating, glowing balls of dancing light—intermittently grab his attention.

Light: Dim light along the riverbanks, bright light in the center of the waterway. Witchlights drift throughout and are visible in the dimly lit areas, but are less noticeable in full daylight.

Monsters: Lajo, male human refugee.

When you are ready to begin, read:
You hear a quiet, rhythmic splashing coming from upriver. Within moments, you see a small log raft turn the bend. A desperate-looking human in tattered clothes stands atop the vessel, holding a tall pole. He appears to be trying to push the raft downstream as quickly as he can. A small cloth bundle is lashed to the deck, and a short sword is shoved point first into the waterlogged wood next to him.

If a character succeeds on the Perception check, add:
Nervous, the man alternates his gaze between the water ahead and some flickering shapes in the shade along the edge of the waterway.

The encounter begins at a fast pace. The adventurers must rush to get as much information as possible from Lajo, a carpenter who is fleeing Treewater, before he floats beyond shouting distance. At the least, they learn that he has embarked on a mission to save his fellow villagers. If the characters ask, Lajo's only possessions are 5 sp, an old and battered short sword, a bundle of clothes, basic tools, 2 days' worth of traveler's rations, minor personal effects, and his crude raft of logs lashed together with strong rope.

Terrain: The river current moves at 4 squares per round, and the raft has a speed of 8 when propelled by Lajo. The river varies in width, from 5 to 10 squares, with shallow, overgrown banks (swamp terrain).

Tactics: When Lajo sees the characters, he acknowledges them but does not stop poling his raft. He is in no mood to stop, but he carries on a conversation with anyone who follows alongside. He tries to keep his raft moving down the middle of the river, but he can hear someone who speaks to him from shore.

Lajo

A middle-aged, hard-working human, Lajo remains skittish from yesterday's lizardfolk attack on Treewater. A character who asks Lajo what he's up to learns the following information: Hoping to help his fellow refugees escape the Brackmarsh lizardfolk, he has set out on a journey downriver to the enclave of Renefik, where he plans to gather boats and assistance.

He asks the adventurers to help a group of refugees from Treewater, who are traveling on foot to the Witchlight Hermitage. He provides directions that make it possible for the characters to travel through the swamp for a couple of hours, intercept the refugees, and help them finish their journey in safety. If the characters mention noticing the witchlights, Lajo explains that the lizardfolk know how to use certain witchlights, known as fastlights, as weapons.

Event 2. Brackmarsh Lizardfolk Scouts

Combat Encounter Level 1 (228 XP)

A Brackmarsh lizardfolk scouting party happens upon the adventurers as they trudge through the swamp en route to their rendezvous with the refugees. The scouts, recognizing that they are outmatched, attempt to follow and observe the characters rather than fight them.

Light: Bright light (daylight), with large areas of deep shadow within the denser vegetation. When combat begins, the witchlights nearest the lizardfolk become agitated and drift closer to them.

Monsters: 6 lizardfolk mire scouts.

When you are ready to begin, read:

You detect an unusual presence. A quick look about reveals a reptilian humanoid blending in with the surrounding foliage and concealed by dark shadows. The subtle rustling of nearby branches and oversized fern fronds suggests that the creature is not alone.

This should be a lightning-quick skirmish. If engaged, the scouts stand little chance against the characters, and they know it. The lizardfolk therefore beat a hasty retreat at the first opportunity. If they cannot all escape, one will make a run for it while the others occupy the heroes.

Treasure: 20 gp distributed among the lizardfolk. Their packs carry spoils from earlier raids, but nothing valuable or useful.

Terrain: An irregular, slippery, and marshy natural path, varying from 1 to 3 squares wide, runs through this area. Low but dense vegetation borders it on either side. The entire area is mud and shallow water, which gives the mire scouts an advantage (swamp walk) that they exploit to escape the adventurers.

Tactics: Initially, four of the mire scouts use *fastlight shot* against the nearest and weakest-looking target while the other two flee at top speed. If one or more of the scouts escape, they can return to aid the lizardfolk in Event 5.

6 Lizardfolk Mire Scouts	**Level 3 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 38 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +8
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage.	
Effect: The scout can shift up to 2 squares.	
⊗ **Fastlight Shot** (radiant) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 5 radiant damage.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+3)	
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	

Event 3. Treewater Refugees

Roleplaying Encounter

After ridding themselves of the lizardfolk scouts, the characters continue to follow Lajo's directions until they come upon the refugees. The survivors are heading for the Witchlight Hermitage as fast as they can.

Perception DC 10: Because the refugees are sacrificing stealth for speed, the characters hear several voices and much rustling of vegetation as the fleeing villagers push their way through the swamp.

Light: Daylight, with large areas of deep shadow within the denser vegetation. Witchlights move about the area and are less noticeable in daylight.

Monsters: Greo (refugee leader), 16 refugees.

When a character succeeds on the Perception check, read:

You hear voices speaking Common, accompanying what sounds like a large group moving through the foliage. The voices shout words of encouragement and direction. A younger voice pleads for them to keep quiet, but to no avail.

The adventurers have plenty of opportunity to plan their approach of the refugees, who are too tired, too terrified, and too loud to notice them coming near. When the characters make their presence known, the refugees dive for cover and must be coaxed out.

Mud and grime cover the battered travelers, remnants of their trek through the swamp. Six have suffered injuries, including two who are struggling to walk and one being carried on a litter by his companions.

Greo asks the characters to help the refugees and to escort them the rest of the way to the. He wants to keep moving to avoid spending another night in the wilderness. The trip from here takes 7 hours, although the travel time can be cut to 5 hours if the adventurers heal the wounded before setting out.

Treasure: 100 gp distributed among the refugees. Most of the travelers carry a small backpack, filled with food and personal effects.

Lore: As the characters travel with the refugees, they learn the following information. Yesterday morning, a Brackmarsh raiding party numbering around thirty lizardfolk attacked the poorly defended village of Treewater. A few skilled warriors sacrificed themselves to give the other villagers time to escape. This group does not know the fate of the village.

Because the refugees had to leave their boats behind and travel overland, their journey has been slow and exhausting. They intend to meet up with Lajo at the Witchlight Hermitage and make use of whatever help he is able to obtain from Renefik.

Greo

The brash young half-elf Greo is the son of the mayor of Treewater. During the attack, his father, Eree, charged him with getting the refugees to safety. As he led the group out of town, he saw his father fall, surrounded by lizardfolk.

Greo is determined to carry out his orders, but he lacks leadership experience, and his high-pitched voice doesn't help. The refugees have little confidence in him. They argue with Greo on several issues, but they all agree on their destination.

Greo asks the characters to escort the refugees to the hermitage. He can offer little payment—only what he can collect by passing the hat.

If Greo gets involved in combat, you can use the elf hunter in *Monster Vault*™ to represent him.

Treewater Refugees

The group of refugees consists of eleven humans and five half-elves aside from Greo, their ages ranging from young adult to old. The villagers let Greo speak for them, but they argue about details. Most of them are older than Greo, and a few of them suggest that he is too young to lead.

Humans: Junlie (wounded), Marshie, Koe, Trav, Nott, Puro, Arl, Delva, and three brothers: Wate, Winlo, and Wek (wounded).

Half-Elves: Qulon (wounded), Nona, Tin, Cren, and Priea.

If the refugees get involved in combat, you can use the human goon in *Monster Vault* to represent them.

Event 4. Arrival at the Hermitage

Roleplaying Encounter

The characters arrive at the hermitage with the refugees, and Greo keeps his charges at a safe distance as the heroes approach the place. There, they discover the aftermath of a lizardfolk attack and inhabitants who are wary of outsiders.

When you are ready to begin, read:

As you push through the thick vegetation, you see a cluster of three small buildings ahead of you. They stand 10 feet above the marshy ground and are linked by wooden walkways with low, open railings. Three sets of stairs lead from the ground to the walkway. Each building has a sturdy-looking wooden door, windows, and a small stone chimney. No smoke rises from the chimneys. The closed windows reveal nothing of what lies within, except that they have been boarded from the inside.

The map for Event 5 shows the hermitage and the area around it. When the characters come close enough to perceive details, continue with:

A lizardfolk body is draped over a walkway railing. A crude barricade blocks the bottom of each of the stairways. Two other crumpled lizardfolk bodies lie half-buried in the muck, apparently having fallen (or been pushed) from the walkways above. Suddenly, sounds of someone moving about come from within the hut nearest you.

Light: Dim light (twilight), with areas of darkness within the denser foliage. A number of witchlights dart around erratically, growing more noticeable as the sky darkens. More witchlights float near the hermitage than in other areas of the swamp.

Monsters: Ofeen Nole (human cleric), Pirta and Haene (refugees).

Although it shows no sign of life, the hermitage is not abandoned. The largest of the three huts is empty. Ofeen is hiding in the second largest one, and Pirta and Haene are sequestered in the smallest one. All three inhabitants watch the approaching characters through slits in the boarded-up windows and doors. Then, Ofeen takes matters into her own hands, emerging from her hut cautiously.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Bluff check or Diplomacy check convinces Ofeen that the characters pose no threat to her. They can accomplish the same result by calling to Greo to bring the refugees out of hiding. When Ofeen learns about the situation, she has the wounded refugees made comfortable inside the largest hut and tends to them as needed.

Afterward, Ofeen meets with the adventurers and Greo in her hut to discuss matters. She hopes to convince the heroes to help her defend the hermitage and beat back the lizardfolk threat. If the adventurers agree, they can prepare defenses overnight before the lizardfolk attack in force.

Treasure: Ofeen, Pirta and Haene's personal possessions, prayer books (nonmagical), and personal diaries.

Lore: If the characters agree to help the hermitage, they learn the following information. Ofeen is the latest owner of the settlement, having converted it to its present function after its previous owner, a smuggler named Nenoo, abandoned it. It has stood in its current form for 15 years, but there have been shacks and huts on the site, intermittently used and abandoned, for almost a century. During one of these

periods, the site was briefly used as a hermitage. The name stuck, and it has been referred to as the Witchlight Hermitage ever since. Ofeen believes that the original settlers had a special reason for picking this spot, and that it had to do with a strange stone circle buried on a nearby island.

Ofeen Nole

Ofeen Nole is a short female human, charismatic and knowledgeable about this region of the Witchlight Fens. She has short, dark hair and wears ornate starburst clasps and jewelry on her plain green cloak. Her clothes, like her heavy holy symbol, show signs of wear from her time in the swamps.

Ofeen believes that Pelor directed her spiritually to the Witchlight Fens to stand against the Shadowfell, to stem the evil of the lizardfolk, and to counter the influence of the dragon Shadowmire. She has turned the smuggler's hideout to good purpose and has become a local institution during the two years that she has lived here.

Although she has faced prior skirmishes with lizardfolk and other dangers of the swamp, the cleric has never before confronted a full assault. Despite making short work of the scouting party, she suspects that the lizardfolk will attack again—likely in the next few hours, before the rescue boats and Lajo can arrive from Renefik. In her view, fleeing with so many exhausted individuals is untenable, whereas fighting here at least provides a defensive advantage.

Pirta and Haene

Pirta and Haene are a merchant couple who were waylaid by the lizardfolk while en route to Treewater. Although they managed to escape, they lost their possessions and their boat in the attack. The couple, who knew of Ofeen, came to the hermitage seeking aid. They try to comfort and encourage the refugees.

Event 5. Brackmarsh Bruisers

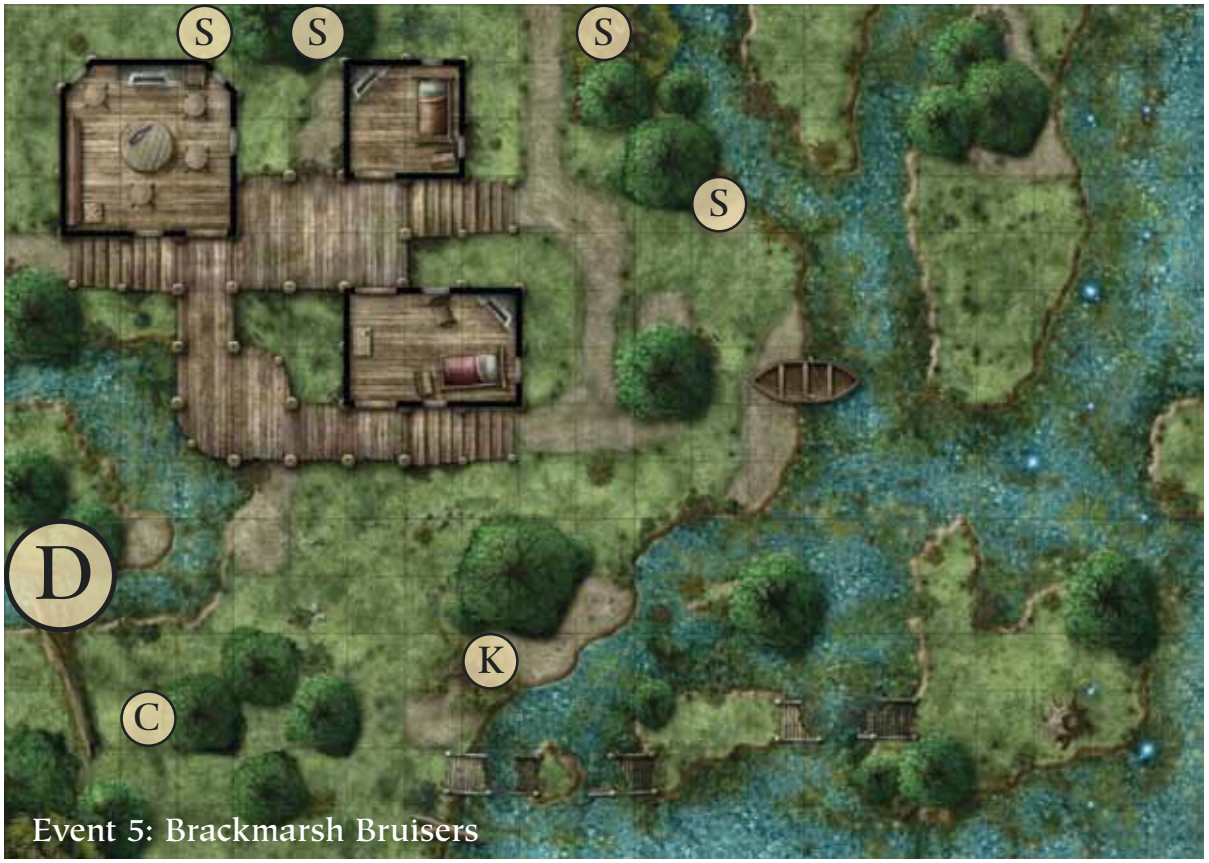
Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,152 XP)

The Brackmarsh lizardfolk attack comes in two waves—one described here and the other in Event 6. This wave pits the lizardfolk's heaviest hitters in a direct assault against the hermitage. The attackers expect to wipe out the defenders before the marsh mystics arrive to investigate the circle of stones buried nearby.

Light: The attack comes an hour after dawn in bright light. The early morning mist provides partial concealment for creatures that are 3 to 5 squares apart and total concealment for those that are 6 or more squares distant from one another. Witchlights glow in the mist.

Monsters: Chak, raid leader (lizardfolk dreadnaught) (C), 1 lizardfolk dreadtail (D), 1 lizardfolk shocker (K), 4 lizardfolk mire scouts (S). In addition, any mire scouts that escaped during Event 2 can appear in this encounter as you see fit.

When the lizardfolk begin their attack, read:
Shafts of sunlight pierce the dawn mist; here and there, softly glowing witchlights dance about. Suddenly, a



Event 5: Brackmarsh Bruisers

lookout's cry rings out, followed quickly by other calls of alarm. All around, hissing tongues shout menacing taunts as several lizardfolk burst from the mist. They wear emblems of a stylized dragon head—the mark of the Brackmarsh, Shadowmire's favored tribe.

The first wave is led by Chak, a dreadnought that towers over the others. The lizardfolk charge in, terrifying the refugees, and Chak taunts them in broken Common. They press the assault until Chak and the dreadtail are killed, after which the minions flee. If the fight lasts 10 rounds or more, the lizardfolk from Event 6 arrive ahead of schedule. If the adventurers win the battle before 10 rounds elapse, they can take a short rest before the next wave arrives.

Treasure: The lizardfolk carry the spoils of their raids. The dreadnought and dreadtail carry 80 gp apiece, and the mire scouts carry 10 gp each. In addition, the dreadtail has 2 gems worth 100 gp each, and the dreadnought carries a *potion of mimicry* and a *+2 bronzewood short sword* (or another level 8 uncommon magic item) in its pack.

Terrain: All squares containing water are difficult terrain.

Raised Platform: Any character on the raised platform who is knocked prone by an attack must succeed on a saving throw to avoid being knocked off. Characters who fail the saving throw take 1d10 damage from the fall (the usual rules for Acrobatics checks apply).

Tactics: Chak and the dreadtail attack the most threatening characters, and the shocker picks off targets from a distance, leaving the mire scouts to battle the refugees or harass the characters by flanking them. If the ablest defenders occupy the platforms, Chak boosts the dreadtail onto it as well, while the

Lizardfolk Dreadnought — **Level 7 Elite Brute (Leader)**
Large natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 600

HP 190; **Bloodied** 95 — **Initiative** +4
AC 19, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 19 — **Perception** +6
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Traits

Dreadnought's Wrath ✦ Aura 2
While in the aura, bloodied allies have a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls.

Staggering Critical
Whenever the dreadnought scores a critical hit, the target is stunned until the end of the target's next turn.

Standard Actions

Greatclub (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 8 damage. The dreadnought pushes the target up to 2 squares and then shifts up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the target.

Minor Actions

Low Blow ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target falls prone.

You Fight Now! ✦ Recharge when first bloodied
Effect: Ranged 5 (one ally). The target can charge as a free action.

Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +7
Str 23 (+9) **Dex** 13 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 5 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic
Equipment bone breastplate, greatclub

Lizardfolk Dreadtail — **Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 200

HP 62; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.
Effect: The dreadtail marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.

Tail Slap ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.

Slap Down ✦ Recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The dreadtail uses *spear* and *tail slap*.

Triggered Actions

Spirit Interference ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares of the dreadtail marks it.
Effect (Free Action): Close burst 5 (triggering enemy). The dreadtail marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +11
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic
Equipment light shield, spear

Lizardfolk Shocker — **Level 5 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 200

HP 50; **Bloodied** 25 — **Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Standard Actions

Greatclub (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage.

Witch Lightning (lightning, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning and radiant damage, and each enemy within 2 squares of the target takes 5 lightning damage.

Ball of Lightning (lightning) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 20 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning damage, and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Triggered Actions

Sudden Jolt (lightning, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 20 squares of the shocker hits it with a ranged or an area attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 10 (triggering enemy in the burst). The target takes 5 lightning and radiant damage.

Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic
Equipment greatclub

4 Lizardfolk Mire Scouts	Level 3 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 38 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +8
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
Standard Actions	
Claw ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage.	
Effect: The scout can shift up to 2 squares.	
Fastlight Shot (radiant) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 5 radiant damage.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+3)	
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	

mire scouts climb over or tear apart barricades on the stairs. Chak might also grab the platform and climb up the supports.

On the heroes' side, Ofeen Nole is a capable combatant who can aid with melee or ranged attacks and provide healing for a couple of her new allies. She cares about protecting the refugees but won't hesitate to come to the defense of a character in trouble.

If the characters allow Greo to help, he leads half of the refugees in defense of the hermitage (the others lack the necessary skills or are too wounded to be helpful). When Greo sees the dreadtail, he foolishly heads off to attack it, believing it to be responsible for the deaths in Treewater.

Ofeen Nole, Cleric of Pelor	Level 5 Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 200
HP 60; **Bloodied** 30	**Initiative** +3
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 19	**Perception** +4
Speed 5	
Standard Actions	
Mace (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.	
Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.	
Priest's Shield (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and Ofeen or one adjacent ally gains a +1 power bonus to AC until the end of Ofeen's next turn.	
Command (charm) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +8 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of Ofeen's next turn. In addition, Ofeen can choose to knock the target prone or slide the target up to 5 squares.	
Minor Actions	
Healing Word (healing) ✦ **2/Encounter** (1/round)	
Effect: One ally within 5 squares of Ofeen spends a healing surge and regains 1d6 + 5 additional hit points.	
Skills Diplomacy +10, Insight +9, Nature +9, Religion +9	
Str 12 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 14 (+4) **Cha** 16 (+5)	
Alignment good **Languages** Common	
Equipment studded leather armor, mace, crossbow, 20 bolts	

Event 6. Fastlight Show

Encounter Level 5 (1,025 XP)

After the first wave distracts and weakens the characters at the hermitage, the second wave advances on the buried circle of stones nearby. Lizardfolk gain an advantage when fighting in this area, which they exploit while battling the adventurers and the boats approaching from the Renefik enclave.

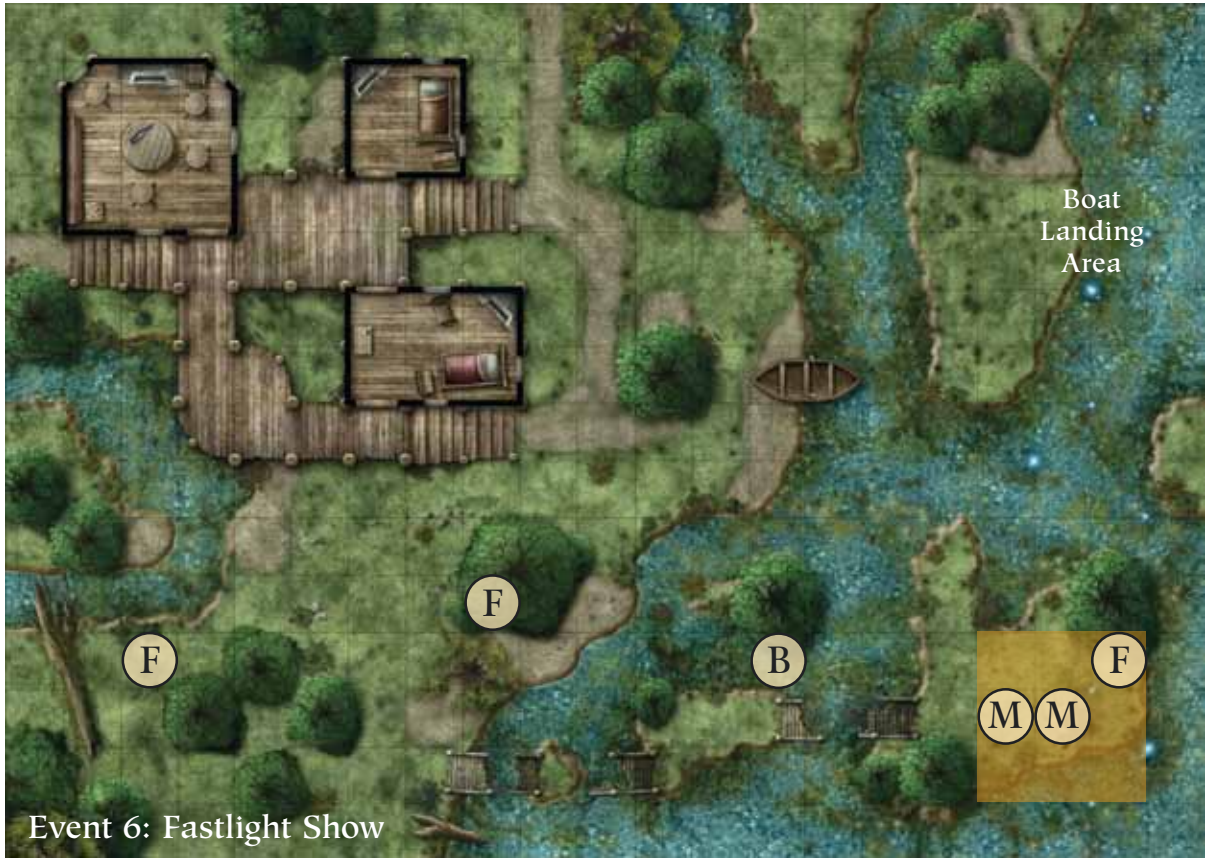
Light: The second wave arrives a little more than an hour after dawn in bright light. The mist has dissipated by now.

CIRCLE OF STONES

A circle of stones such as the one here marks an area in the Witchlight Fens where fastlights occur more frequently and lizardfolk can more readily manipulate them. Over the years, lizardfolk marsh mystics marked these areas with runes or tablets for easy recognition. Circles of stones were reserved for lizardfolk settlements that were built around them.

The circle at the hermitage originated with a lizardfolk settlement over 100 years ago. The settlement was wiped away by the original hermitage settlers, and the circle has been lost in the mud ever since.

Any creature in the 3-by-3-square area indicated on the map can improve any radiant power it has, choosing either to double the power's range or to deal 5 extra radiant damage on a successful hit each time such a power is used. These additional capabilities have a visual effect on the lights: Fastlights used at greater range glow twice as brightly as typical fastlights do, and those that cause greater damage expand to twice their original size before striking their target.



Event 6: Fastlight Show

Monsters: 2 lizardfolk marsh mystics (M), 3 lizardfolk fen spies (F), 1 lizardfolk bog walker (B).

When the second wave arrives, read:
A pair of marsh mystics approaches a large stump on a nearby island. One gesticulates upon seeing it, while the second starts knocking the mud off several stones widely spaced around the stump. More witchlights gather around them and brighten as they reach the borders of the ruined circle. Otherwise, the witchlights maintain their haphazard, drifting patterns.

The lizardfolk use the special quality of this area to boost their ability to use fastlights against the refugees and the characters.

At the start of the fifth round of combat, Lajo arrives from the Renefik enclave with five empty boats in tow. If the opportunity presents itself, Ofeen directs the refugees to run for the boats. Each boat is 1 square wide and 2 squares long and can hold up to six people.

Treasure: The lizardfolk carry treasure obtained in earlier raids. The fen spies each have 15 gp and a gem worth 100 gp. One marsh mystic has 10 gp and a small but fancy gold and silver goblet worth 250 gp. The other marsh mystic carries 10 gp and a *+1 cloak of distortion* (or another level 4 uncommon magic item).

Terrain: All squares containing water are difficult terrain.

Tactics: The marsh mystics and one fen spy fight from within the circle of stones, using their improved radiant powers (see the sidebar). The

2 Lizardfolk Marsh Mystics **Level 4 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP 175 each

HP 53; **Bloodied** 26 **Initiative** +3
AC 18, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 18 **Perception** +10
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Traits

Marsh Mist ✦ Aura 10
While in the aura, the marsh mystic's allies cannot be surprised and have a +5 power bonus to Perception checks and Stealth checks.

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, and the marsh mystic can slide the target 1 square.

Fastlight Shock (lightning, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 4 lightning and radiant damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the marsh mystic's next turn. If the target was already immobilized, it is instead dazed.
Miss: The target is slowed until the end of the marsh mystic's next turn.

Bog Cloud (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 3 poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).

Skills Nature +10, Stealth +8
Str 12 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 17 (+5)
Con 13 (+3) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 11 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic
Equipment spear

3 Lizardfolk Fen Spies (F)	Level 4 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 175 each
HP 41; **Bloodied** 20	**Initiative** +9
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +9
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Thorn Dagger** (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Reflex until the end of the fen spy's next turn.	
⊕ **Fastlight Strike** (radiant) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The fen spy must be invisible.	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d6 + 8 radiant damage, and the target is blinded and takes ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends both).	
Miss: Half damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.	
Witchlight Mists ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The fen spy becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until immediately after it attacks.	
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10	
Str 12 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 11 (+2) **Int** 7 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment thorn dagger	

other two fen spies stay on the move, using *witchlight mists* to outflank and launch surprise attacks against their enemies (and Ofeen in particular). The bog walker prefers to stay in the water squares, where it can use *drag down* against any enemy trying to approach the circle.

Any lizardfolk that finds itself not engaged in combat attacks one of the boats (hp 30, AC 8, Fortitude 8, Reflex 5, Will –). In order for the characters to ultimately get the refugees to safety, at least four of the five boats must be intact. The battle continues until the lizardfolk defeat Ofeen and the heroes or until the marsh mystics, the fen spies, and the bog walker are killed.

Lizardfolk Bog Walker (B)	Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 150
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22	**Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14	**Perception** +7
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Drag Down** ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The bog walker must be in water at least 5 feet (1 square) deep, and it must not have a creature grabbed.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 13). Until the grab ends, the target must make a DC 13 Endurance check at the start of each of its turns. If the check fails, the target takes 10 damage.	
Miss: The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8	
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)	
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	

Conclusion

If the lizardfolk are defeated, the Brackmarsh lizardfolk avoid the hermitage and the Renefik enclave for several months. Shadowmire, after learning of the adventurers, might send lizardfolk or other agents to attack them if they cause further trouble.

If Ofeen survives, she learns the significance of the circle of stones, and the knowledge strengthens her resolve to stand strong in the fens. Seeking followers for the hermitage, she finds ready volunteers among the refugees. Eventually, they will strive to evict the Brackmarsh lizardfolk from Treewater. Ofeen invites the adventurers to join in these efforts.

If the characters win the battle but Ofeen does not survive, the surviving refugees withdraw to the Renefik enclave for the time being. The hermitage is abandoned, unless the adventurers want to take it over. A few weeks after it is abandoned, lizardfolk discover it empty and return to take possession of it. The characters can return to Renefik or move on to their next adventure.

If the lizardfolk win the battle, they expand the hermitage, turning it into a new stronghold they call Shiikiir, after the original lizardfolk settlement established 100 years ago. They become a great threat to the area and attack the Renefik enclave one month after the Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage. In this event, the Renefik halflings might ask the adventurers to help mount a defense or escort an evacuation.

About the Author

Sterling Hershey is an architect and freelance game designer. He was one of the designers of *Monster Vault™: Threats to the Nentir Vale™* and contributes to D&D® Insider. Sterling has worked extensively in a galaxy far, far away, designing many *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* and *Star Wars Miniatures* game books and products.

EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

The City of Zarash'ak

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Adam Paquette

Kuv dagga! Smell the sizzling slugs and the fresh ashi bread! Say what you like about Sharn and Fairhaven—my heart's home lies on the stilts of Zarash'ak.

—Alaar Velderan, Tharashk Inquisitive

No lightning rail crosses the Shadow Marches, and House Orien won't risk its caravans in the treacherous marshlands. No trade roads connect the scattered villages. For generations, the Marcher clans were virtually independent kingdoms, battling all challengers to maintain their dominions in the darkness.

This situation changed with the rise of House Tharashk and the demand for dragonshards. Galifar's hunger for the mystic crystals was a source of wealth and influence for the heirs of Tharashk, provided they could process the crystals and move them to the markets of the east. The three dominant Tharashk clans were quick to establish refineries, but their ancestral homes were too deep in the Marches to facilitate easy trade with Galifar. The leaders of the clans came together to build the largest city the Marches had ever seen—a port that could carry shards and services to the wider world.

It proved impossible to erect a city on the shores of the Zarash Bay, so architects made their way up the Glum River until they found a region that was stable enough. Even then, building the port was no simple task. The Glum is unpredictable and prone to floods, and the only way to secure a foundation was to raise the city above the river. This style of building is common throughout the Marches, but no

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construction on this scale had ever been attempted. The creation of Zarash'ak took a decade and the resources of all three great clans. The Torrn druids raised mighty murk oaks from the depths of the Glum. Aided by the brute strength of Aashta laborers, clever Velderan architects built a foundation of interlocking platforms using the trees as supports. Additional piles and pillars were dropped into the Glum, and in time Zarash'ak was born.

Today Zarash'ak is known across Khorvaire as the seat of House Tharashk and the gateway to the Shadow Marches. Those who wish to deal with the leadership of the House of Finding or venture into the depths of the Marches likely find their way to the City of Stilts.

Traveling to Zarash'ak

No secure overland route to Zarash'ak exists. In recent years House Lyrandar has established an airship docking tower in the City of Stilts, and airships remain the swiftest and safest way to reach Zarash'ak. However, many captains refuse to risk their vessels in the skies of Droaam or the wild Marches. As a result, most visitors come to Zarash'ak across the water, laying anchor in Zarash Bay and taking ferries up the Glum River. Typically, the journey costs 10 gp per traveler, but no standards are enforced; ferry operators might charge more for wealthy passengers. The threat of Tharashk bounty hunters generally deters piracy along the Glum, but the river's dangers include chuuls, mad cultists, and strange horrors of the daelkyr that have risen from the depths.

Getting into the City

Rope ladders and lifts carry new arrivals from the Glum to the platforms of Zarash'ak. Tharashk recently installed a single levitating lift for the heaviest loads, but most of the cranes and elevators are powered by orc muscle or ogre laborers from Droaam.

The primary docks are beneath the Heart, the original core of the city. Those who enter through the docks are evaluated by the Liondrake guards of House Tharashk. These minders care little for identification papers or nationality, but they have a good nose for visitors with trouble on their minds, and a person who offends the Liondrakes might be pushed off a platform into the river. The easiest way to avoid the scrutiny of the guards is to arrive in the company of a Tharashk heir who can dismiss them. Another option is to work with the heirs of Clan Orgaal, who bring goods into Zarash'ak on the wings of wyverns. An Orgaal camp sits north of Zarash'ak, and sufficient gold or other interesting offers can purchase a means of entry into the City of Stilts.

The Sights and Smells of Zarash'ak

Citizens of the Five Nations often find their first visit to Zarash'ak a disturbing experience. The stench of the city's waste mixes with the naturally foul waters of the Glum, and Marchers have different attitudes toward body odor than do the people of the east. These factors inspired the poet Kessler to call Zarash'ak "the city of a thousand stinks." Amid the squalor, the magic of the Torrn druids ensures that the residents have pure water for drinking.

The Heart is the original center of the city, supported by the trunks of massive murk oaks. This area is dominated by the Tharashk enclave and its associated businesses and barracks. The dragonshard refineries are deeper in the Marches, but at any given time the vaults of the Heart hold a fortune in shards waiting to be shipped to the east. The enclave of Zarash'ak is the home of the Tharashk triumvirate, which sets the overall vision for the house. It is also the seat of the Finder's Guild, and many Tharashk heirs learn to harness their mystical gifts in the Heart of Zarash'ak.

The Ring surrounds the Heart and is constantly expanding. New levels are added to existing buildings, and new platforms are attached to the old. This work is done by different architects with wildly varying levels of skill, and the result is a ramshackle patchwork of a city. Some platforms have wide paths that could almost be considered roads; on and around other platforms, rope ladders are the only way to move from place to place. Most of the respected heirs of the house live in the Heart, leaving the Ring to traders, laborers, and travelers who can afford to stay out of the Webs. However, as the city's population continues to grow, some members of the Tharashk clans are forced to settle in the Ring.

In general, the Ring is a bustling place. Merchants abound, offering everything from broiled slugs and handmade knives to healing salves and Gatekeeper charms. Beggars and thieves watch for unwary foreigners, and cultists of the Dragon Below take to the streets in search of new recruits. It's a wild and chaotic environment, with opportunities for those seeking to make contact with Gatekeeper druids, followers of the Dragon Below, or guides to the deeper Marches.

The Webs stretch beneath the rest of the city, in the cramped space between the surface of the river and the lowest platforms of the Ring. The structures here are canopies supported by ropes anchored to the platforms above and the stilts. All of these structures are temporary by design, because when flooding is bad, the lowest canopies can be swept away. Here the poor and the mad mingle with those who enjoy the freedom of a hidden life in the shadows. If you know your way around, the Webs can be the fastest means of moving about Zarash'ak, but running the ropes is dangerous for anyone who has poor balance or enemies in the deeps.

The City of Stilts has no streets as such, and directions are typically based on the names of buildings, the presence of certain people, or strong scents. For example, a traveler might be told to "follow the scent

of the midden heap on the North Ring, and look for Torgaan's black door."

Life in the City of Stilts

For a city of its small size, Zarash'ak is a thriving community. In addition to the blood heirs of Tharashk, the City of Stilts draws people from across the Marches. Despite Tharashk's growing influence, most of the dragonmarked houses prefer to deal with the Finder's Guild in a more stable location, and many of the services that travelers are accustomed to buying from the dragonmarked must be purchased through locals. A single Sivis message station exists in the Heart, along with the Lyrandar Tower and a lone Gold Dragon Inn; healing services are provided by leech-wielding novice druids instead of the heirs of House Jorasco.

The Shadow Marches aren't a recognized nation. The Marches didn't sign the Treaty of Thronehold and aren't bound by the Code of Galifar. What order exists is imposed by House Tharashk; enforcement and execution are in the hands of the elite Liondrake soldiers and inquisitives. Crimes that occur outside the Heart are largely ignored unless they threaten the house or the city, but anyone who tries to rob the Velderan vaults or disrupt the Sivis message station is hunted down with ruthless efficiency. In general, Marchers are expected to handle their own problems, whether that means defending themselves, hiring ogres as guards, or having a clan of vengeful relatives willing to pursue offenders.

Humans, orcs, and half-orcs make up the bulk of the population in Zarash'ak. A few hundred goblins live in the Webs, along with a number of gnomes, halflings, and half-elves. Traffic with Droaam has brought monstrous creatures to the city; ogres and gargoyles work across Zarash'ak, and each of the Tharashk triumvirs has a medusa bodyguard. The Common tongue remains the standard language in the Heart, but many in the Ring and the Webs speak only Goblin. A significant number of residents speak a language they call Azhani, a blend of the Old Common of Sarlona and Goblin. People who speak Riedran or Goblin can communicate with those who speak Azhani, but nuances can be lost. (For more information on Azhani, see Don Bassingthwaite's *The Dragon Below* novels or his look at the language here).

Traffic with the east has brought the coins of Galifar and Riedra to the city, and they are used interchangeably in Zarash'ak. Some merchants prefer to barter for goods, and many citizens use raw dragonshard crystals as a form of currency.

Forces to Be Reckoned With

The greatest power in Zarash'ak is House Tharashk. The house is divided into a number of factions, each with its own interests, and the Liondrakes are a proud unit that often pursues its own goals.

The Cults of the Dragon Below are driven by wildly divergent agendas. The Aashta cultists of the daelkyr Kyrzin are well established and subtle in their schemes. By contrast, the eyes of the daelkyr Belashyrra are prone to dramatic and dangerous plots. In the Webs, a goblin named Jhugaar preaches raving sermons promising the rise of the Overlord known as the Voice in the Darkness. If true, this prophecy could draw the Lords of Dust to Zarash'ak (though, of course, it could be madness).

The Gatekeeper Druids have strong ties to Clan Torrn of Tharashk, and Torrn employs primal magic to sustain the city. The Triumvir Maagrim forbids her people from fighting within Zarash'ak. The city remains an invaluable place to make contact with the Gatekeepers and study primal rituals, and the hidden sect known as the Valshara'ak Seal might recruit adventurers who show great promise.

Clan Orgaal is a branch of the ambitious ruling Clan Velderan. These clans seek to increase Tharashk's influence across Khorvaire and to ensure Velderan's ultimate dominance within the house. Velderan has no interest in the Gatekeepers or the cults, and the clan exploits their squabbles to weaken its rivals. The ruling clans pay little attention to the small, orc-dominated Orgaal, which allows Velderan to use it for covert activities. Orgaal could employ adventurers to sow discord among other clans or embark on missions that aid Velderan at the expense of its rivals.

House Deneith has no strong presence in Zarash'ak, but a rivalry is growing between the Sentinels and the Finders. Agents of the house could turn up at any time to cause trouble in Zarash'ak, likely disguising their sabotage as the work of Riedrans or Dragon Below cultists.

Lord Toka Threefangs is the ambassador of the Droaam warlord Kethelrax the Cunning. Threefangs is gaining influence among the goblins of the Webs with his tales of the kobold king, and some among the Liondrakes wonder how he plans to use his growing clout.

Riedra has established a small outpost in the city to discuss working with the Finder's Guild. Is Ambassador Sosharani an agent of the Dreaming Dark?

About the Author

Keith Baker is an award-winning game designer and novelist best known for his work on the *EBERRON® Campaign Setting* and the card game *Gloom*. His most recent novel is *The Fading Dream*, the third in the Thorn of Breland series. Follow Keith on Twitter as @HellcowKeith.

Monster Manual Update: Ghosts

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by Anne Stokes

The souls of the dead linger on, haunting dark and lonely places. Their incomplete lives tether them to the mortal world, their spirits unable to pass through to the other side.

Forbidding mansions, poisoned wells, abandoned temples—such are the forsaken places where ghosts dwell and where the living fear to tread. Often, rumors of hauntings are just that—rumors. But at sites tainted by misery, terror, and death, these rumors could be true. A ghost is what remains of a being whose soul should have moved on after death, but was trapped. This entrapment commonly occurs because the being has a strong urge to complete a task that tears and fragments its soul.

Forsaken Souls: Ghosts, unlike some kinds of undead, retain their souls. This is not to say that the souls remain intact. Ghosts arise from beings that have already stained their souls with murderous, vengeful, cruel, or obsessive deeds. The corruption of an evil life or a limitless need to right a perceived wrong holds the soul back. Upon death, the being's other traits are wrested away. Compassion and love disappear, leaving the darkest, most obsessive remnants of the creature's personality. Lacking a rational mind to control its excesses, the soul goes after what it wants, no matter the consequences. Priests, particularly those who worship the Raven Queen or Pelor, prefer to save the souls of ghosts peacefully. If such a priest finds that a ghost became trapped for a good reason (such as being the victim of a murder, or perishing while attempting to thwart an evil mastermind), he or she attempts to right the wrong and send the ghost's soul on to the Raven Queen's domain in Letherna. Worshipers of Asmodeus also take a special interest in ghosts, but for a different reason: They imprison the souls, securing them for their evil master.

Unfinished Business: An all-consuming purpose keeps a soul in the world and transforms it into a ghost. A sadistic torturer might return as a ghost to cause more pain and misery. The ghost of a victim of a cruel death often seeks revenge on her murderer. A soldier who died young might guard a chamber, ghostly blade in hand, eager to strike down any intruder to prove his worth. The bitter irony of becoming a ghost is that even though the soul's existence is sustained in order to complete a goal, the ghost loses the power to attain that goal. A ghost that retains full knowledge of its purpose might be confined to a certain location or unable to manifest fully. Or the ghost might not fully recall its goal. A ghost can retain strong emotions and still feel an urgent need, but at the same time fail to recall the focus of its ire. Such a creature wanders aimlessly, doomed to never find rest without another's help, and lashing out against anyone who comes into its domain.

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The Visage of Death: The appearance a ghost had in life forms the basis for its ghostly manifestation. A ghost might look exactly as it did in life, or one might appear more attractive if its cause for becoming a ghost stemmed from its vanity. Some ghosts exhibit a change in form or appearance that reflects the way they died. A drowning victim constantly sheds ghostly water. A hanged man's head hangs loose on a broken neck, rolling back and forth. To pull itself into a somewhat corporeal form, a ghost has to exert the full strength of its will. It spends the rest of its time in a diffuse state, perceived as a chill in the air or an ineffable sensation that causes the hair to stand up on the back of one's neck. A ghost pulls itself together when it needs to confront someone (likely through violence) or communicate its message.

Signs of Haunting: A ghost has no real body, just a manifestation it pulls together with its will. The soul reaches out to manipulate the world. In a place haunted by a ghost, doors slam seemingly on their own, candles snuff out, scrolls roll open, and latches snap closed. An angered ghost might—consciously or unconsciously—hurl objects at the cause of its anger or cause the floor to shake. In addition to wreaking havoc in the physical world, a ghost's soul can project illusions, such as blood running down walls or voices whispering.

I recognize him. Denth Madros. He was a good man, and I cannot bear to see what he has become. We have to put him to rest.

-Ellis Temberon of House Harskel

Answer to No One: Ghosts rarely come under the command of others. One willingly serves another creature only if it can be convinced that the way to attain its goal is by doing that creature's bidding. Bribes and threats never succeed in controlling a ghost. Instead, one might follow a charismatic master who feeds it untrue promises, or become a slave to a potent spellcaster who shackles it with a binding ritual. An enslaved ghost rankles under such compulsion, spewing hateful words at its master or causing nearby objects to rattle and shatter.

A Mind Obscured: A ghost sees the world through a veil, filtering everything it senses to make it fit in with the creature's obsession. If a ghost has a hated enemy, it believes anyone it encounters to be agents of that enemy. A ghost's memories of life are vivid in its mind, causing it to continually relive the traumatic events of its past. Even though the ghost knows that the consequences of those events can't be changed—or perhaps because it has this realization—the flashbacks it recalls cause it to lash out, trying instinctively to prevent the pain it suffered when it lived and avoid its tragic fate. In rare cases, a ghost might perceive living creatures as people it respected or loved in life. An intruder who reminds the ghost of a dead spouse, a beloved comrade-at-arms, or its long-lost lost child could become an unwitting diplomat able to communicate on some level with the delusional spirit. A ghost experiences clarity of mind only when faced with the subject of its obsession. The person, place, or object it seeks remains true in its perception at all times.

Ghostly Prisoners: Though a ghost most often arises because of the state of mind of a recently dead person, one can be artificially created. Cruel people who want to punish the deceased and who have a bit of arcane knowledge can create a ghost charm—a bit of metal, clay, or parchment inscribed with runes—that they inter with a fresh corpse. If the ritual is performed soon enough after death, the dead person's soul becomes trapped in the world as a ghost. The soul within a ghost charm can be freed if the charm is destroyed. Removing the object from the grave, barrow, or urn in which the corpse rests can also end the person's ghostly existence. A ghost charm made of an impermanent substance, such as parchment, might disintegrate on its own over time.

Phantom Warrior	**Level 4 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 175
HP 36; **Bloodied** 18	**Initiative** +7
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	**Perception** +7
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
Insubstantial	
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.	
Phantom Tactics	
The phantom warrior has combat advantage against any enemy that has another phantom warrior adjacent to it.	
Standard Actions	
⨁ **Phantom Sword** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage.	
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the phantom warrior's next turn.	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 11 (+2)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 18 (+6)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	

Trap Haunt	**Level 8 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 350
HP 47; **Bloodied** 23	**Initiative** +12
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19	**Perception** +9
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	

Traits

Insubstantial
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.

Trapbound
The ghost cannot voluntarily move more than 20 squares from the place where it died. If it is forced beyond this range, it is weakened and unable to use *ghostly possession* until it moves back within range.

Standard Actions

Grave Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage.

Ghostly Possession (charm) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Melee 1 (one living humanoid); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The trap haunt is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends). When the target is no longer dominated, the trap haunt reappears in a square of its choice adjacent to the target. The trap haunt can voluntarily end this effect at the end of its turn.

Str 10 (+4)	**Dex** 18 (+8)	**Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 11 (+4)	**Cha** 16 (+7)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

GHOSTLY POSSESSION REMINDERS

The trap haunt and the tormenting ghost both have a *ghostly possession* attack. Although the creature is removed from play, it still takes the start and the end of its turn. This means you still make recharge rolls and have a chance to end the effect if the creature so chooses.

Tormenting Ghost	**Level 21 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 3,200
HP 137; **Bloodied** 68	**Initiative** +19
AC 33, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32	**Perception** +17
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	

Traits

Insubstantial
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.

Standard Actions

Spirit Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +24 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 12 necrotic damage.

Ghostly Possession (charm) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Melee 1 (one living humanoid); +24 vs. Will
Hit: The ghost is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends). When the target is no longer dominated, the ghost reappears in a square of its choice adjacent to the target. The ghost can voluntarily end this effect at the end of its turn.

Burst of Terror (fear, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +24 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 8 necrotic damage, the ghost pushes the target 5 squares, and the target is dazed and immobilized (save ends both).

Ghostly Terrain (zone) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Area burst 1 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter or until the ghost uses this power again. Squares in the zone are difficult terrain and lightly obscured. Any creature that enters the zone or ends its turn there is immobilized (save ends). A creature can end the immobilization with a successful escape attempt (DC 26).

Triggered Actions

Spectral Shift ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The ghost is missed by a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The ghost shifts up to 3 squares.

Skills Stealth +24

Str 11 (+10)	**Dex** 28 (+19)	**Wis** 14 (+12)
Con 20 (+15)	**Int** 12 (+11)	**Cha** 25 (+17)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Wailing Ghost (Banshee)	**Level 12 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 700
HP 81; **Bloodied** 40	**Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24	**Perception** +13
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	

Traits

Insubstantial
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.

Standard Actions

Spirit Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 5 necrotic damage.

Death's Visage (fear, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +15 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 9 psychic damage.
Effect: The target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).

Terrifying Shriek (fear, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, the banshee pushes the target up to 5 squares, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Skills Stealth +13

Str 14 (+8)	**Dex** 15 (+8)	**Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 13 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+6)	**Cha** 17 (+9)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

About the Author

Logan Bonner's credits include *The Slaying Stone*™ and *Monster Vault*™. He lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's @loganbonner.

Monster Manual Update: Wights

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by David Griffith

The soulless, brutal wights yearn to regain the souls they lost in death. Only drawing life force from the living, watching their blood flow, and feeling their bones crunch can momentarily sate the hunger.

Wights are undead that retain their human craftiness and martial skill after death, but whose minds are consumed with evil thoughts. A wight dwells in underground tombs and tunnels, and encountering a wight is a terrifying experience—coming face to face with pure evil. A ghost can be sent to eternal rest, and a vampire can be reasoned with, but a wight can be stopped only if it is destroyed. As long as its corpse can still move, its hate drives it to fight and kill.

No Souls, Only Malice: A creature that dies and becomes a wight loses its soul. A wight is far from mindless, however, and the loss of its soul fills it with constant pain. This sense of loss is tremendous and all-consuming; nothing can fill the void. A wight brutally attacks and slays creatures that have souls, trying in vain to reclaim what it has lost. Those who have witnessed wights being "born" swear that the creatures don't rise spontaneously from corpses. Rather, a force—an evil beyond mortal imagining—flows into the body. This is something sensed rather than seen; the force fills every fiber of the creature's

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being, a black whisper fundamentally opposed to life and the living. Superstitions claim that this evil escapes when a wight dies, and to prevent this, it must be trapped at the moment of death. Wights can be found in airtight rooms, chained to the bottom of bodies of water, or encased in magic ice to keep the evil from returning.

Life-Draining Touch: The touch of a wight causes its victim's life force to drain away. The wight feeds on this vitality, which provides it with a brief moment of bliss amid the agony of its existence. Where the wight's claws dig in, the victim's skin turns a sickly gray. The muscles atrophy, and hair falls out in ragged patches. Though the part of the body where the wight struck is most severely affected, the entire body shows signs of the attack. The eyes become sunken, streaks of hair turn white, and the whole body looks as though the victim were a decade older. It doesn't take long for the visible effect to pass when the victim breaks off contact with the wight, but the experience is unnerving. Years after a wight attack, the scars on a victim still show traces of supernatural power. Ashen streaks mark where the scratches once were, hair around the scars grows white, and joints near the wound remain stiff.

Barrows and Catacombs: Wights shun the light and live underground. Few stray far from where they were buried. In fact, wights typically arise as a group, with each body interred in a particular crypt becoming a wight at the same time. Wights grow accustomed to living in the darkness underground. When they smell fresh air, they quickly come to suspect that creatures from above have wandered into their domain. They familiarize themselves with the entrances, exits, secret tunnels, traps, and pitfalls in their catacombs. A wight could spring out from a secret door or prepare a spell to snuff out lights and make its enemies fight blind. This is one of the reasons wights don't stray far from their crypt homes:

Just one look in its eyes, and you know a wight is not a man. It hates the living. It hates us and everything we have. All the beast wants is our souls and our blood.

–Garibanz of Harkenwold

They prefer to fight on familiar terrain where they have the advantage. They're quick to give chase, though, and a shrewd opponent can lead the ravenous wights away to gain an advantage.

Tacticians and Warriors: Buried soldiers and mercenaries become wights more often than other kinds of corpses do. When a group of warriors turns into wights, the group maintains the same hierarchy it followed in life—captains remain in charge of their subordinates, and a king is still a king (although one without a kingdom). The new wights still know how to fight tactically and set ambushes. They maintain patrols, remaining active long after death. Though they're driven by hate, they're rational enough to avoid rushing heedlessly into combat when they have advance notice. They would rather set up a surprise attack that ensures victory than take a chance that might let living creatures escape.

Servants to Undead Masters: Wights loathe the living and don't work for them willingly. They do follow intelligent undead, however, especially liches. If a wight's master shows contempt for the living and a desire to bring violence, pain, and death, the wight is an eager servant. In undead armies, wights become elite troops. They rank below death knights and above the mindless skeletons and zombies. Unless they're working for a more powerful master, wights rarely associate with mindless undead. They think of them the same way dungeon keepers do—as little more than tools. A skeleton is fit to eternally wander a passageway and serve as a minor deterrent, nothing more. Oddly enough, this is the same way wights are seen by more intelligent beings. Powerful wizards, liches, and masterminds relocate wights to their dungeons to act as unwitting guards. A wight might not like this situation, but that won't stop it from killing any living, breathing surface-dweller who comes along.

Creatures of Greed and Envy: A wight desires what the living possess, and a wight's life underground plays out like a sick imitation of life in the world above. The creatures covet treasure hoards and seek out wealth as though they had use for it. In actuality, wights don't buy anything, nor can they be bribed. A wight closely guards the possessions it was buried with. Whether these items are ancient treasures that used to belong to nobles, or simple baubles from wights that used to be peasants, they take on deep significance to the undead. The arms and armor of a wight might be centuries old, but they remain in excellent condition because the creatures maintain their gear. One exception would be a wight that had been long dead before it was raised. If enough time passed for the wight's armor, weapons, and clothing to rust or decompose, the wight is unlikely to have the supplies to repair them.

Deathlock Wight **Level 4 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 175

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target loses a healing surge.

Grave Bolt (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Horrific Visage (fear, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚅ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +7 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the wight pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Minor Actions

Reanimate (healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Ranged 10 (one destroyed undead creature of level 6 or lower that is not a minion). The target regains hit points equal to one-half its bloodied value. It can stand up as a free action.

Skills Arcana +10, Religion +10
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 9 (+1)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 16 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+6)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Wight **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 200

HP 62; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16 **Perception** +0
Speed 7 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target loses a healing surge.
Effect: The wight shifts up to 3 squares.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 6 (+0)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 15 (+4)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Battle Wight **Level 9 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 400

HP 98; **Bloodied** 49 **Initiative** +7
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 22 **Perception** +3
Speed 5 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Soul-Draining Longsword** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and it is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

Soul Reaping (healing, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚅
Attack: Ranged 5 (one immobilized creature); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + 9 necrotic damage, and the wight regains 10 hit points.

Skills Intimidate +14
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 13 (+5) **Wis** 9 (+3)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 20 (+9)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

Battle Wight Commander **Level 12 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 700

HP 124; **Bloodied** 62 **Initiative** +10
AC 28, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 25 **Perception** +13
Speed 5 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Soul-Draining Longsword** (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and it is immobilized and weakened until the end of its next turn.

Soul Reaping (healing, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚅
Attack: Ranged 5 (one immobilized creature); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 18 necrotic damage, and the wight and all its undead allies within 2 squares of it regain 10 hit points.

Skills Intimidate +16
Str 20 (+11) **Dex** 15 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 15 (+8) **Cha** 20 (+11)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

Slaughter Wight **Level 18 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 2,000

HP 212; **Bloodied** 106 **Initiative** +14
AC 30, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +13
Speed 7 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 15 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and is it weakened until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Death Wail (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The wight drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (each enemy in the burst); +21 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 4 necrotic damage.
Effect: Each undead ally in the burst can make a basic attack as a free action.

Str 26 (+17) **Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 9 (+8)
Con 22 (+15) **Int** 12 (+10) **Cha** 18 (+13)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

About the Author

Logan Bonner's credits include *The Slaying Stone*™ and *Monster Vault*™. He lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's @loganbonner.

Snowflake Treasures

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Illustration by Adam Paquette

Never underestimate the power of treasure. Gaining levels is cool, but it's predictable and, for the most part, planned. Treasure and magic items are the adventurers' true rewards. They are why we kick down doors, what we receive for a job well done, and how we snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Items amp up your adventurers' powers and abilities and supply random elements that your players might work into their character concepts. A player whose fighter gains a powerful *dragonslayer longbow* early on might adjust the fighter's build over the following levels to take advantage of the powerful new weapon, especially if the adventurer is on a quest to hunt dragons. A *dragonslayer* weapon is a good treasure item because it's more than a serviceable weapon: It sets the character on a classic quest.

It's not enough to hand out goodies, however; treasures must be special. I believe that not following this simple rule explains much of the dissatisfaction people feel toward treasure parcels. The parcel system keeps the game organized and helps ensure that a character's statistics and level align. Unfortunately, in the bustle of campaign upkeep, DMs using the system sometimes neglect the air of mystery that should surround magic items. Worse, they forget that they should occasionally reward their adventurers' remarkable efforts with exceptional items.

I'm not saying that you can't still award the usual deluge of armor, weapons, and wondrous items; I'm only suggesting that you occasionally make a few minor tweaks: first, give items to specific characters; second, dole out "snowflake" treasures—items possessed by no other character (and, possibly, no other creature). Above all, these rare or unique items should speak to your players' desires and fit the tone of the campaign and characters.

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The best special treasure for each character derives more from the players and their characters than the rules system. Each of the adventurers is a unique snowflake; to determine the appropriate items for them, you must figure out what your players want for their characters. I know it sounds daunting, but don't fret. Below are four strategies to guide you through designing and granting snowflake treasures.

Unique and Modified Magic Items

At its core, a magic item is a package of rules that describe how the item works and how it improves as a character levels up. Such rules are necessary, and they constitute an additional facet of character design and development, one enjoyed by system analysts and bookkeeper players alike.

For some players, searching for new magic items in recent sources is a beloved pastime, but other players want more for their character than they can achieve by min-maxing the latest equipment. They crave a more personal quality of advancement. For such players, don't be afraid to get creative.

Here's an example. One of my campaigns is approaching the epic tier. In it, the party's rogue carries a dagger made of black crystal (it's cliché, I know, but fun). On a critical hit, the dagger deals no extra damage; instead, it stuns its target until the end of the rogue's next turn. Needless to say, she's been making good use of the blade. Of course, the weapon's advantages do not come without cost, and there's more to the weapon than meets the eye.

The blade is an imprisoned Far Realm entity that requires souls to fuel its escape from its dagger prison—souls that it has been siphoning from the rogue's victims. Already, the creature has gained nearly enough power to express its will to its wielder. As the rogue levels up, the entity grows stronger, and the blade grants further powers that make the rogue a better striker and backstabber—if she expends part of her soul. Each exchange does real damage to her and brings the entity one step closer to escape. Who knows what terrible acts it will commit when it breaks loose?

Although my black crystal blade is no bastion of originality, it provides tension for the character, who will likely have to destroy it at some crack of doom (I use the cliché to my advantage as a storyteller, because it lets my player understand the possibilities without my having to explain them). Although she's played in my campaign for a long time and knows my tricks, the player keeps the dagger because she thinks it's awesome and she is morbidly curious about its endgame. Mystery fused with power is the essence of magic.

It's easy to overdo special magic items, so remember: They need not all be as "epic" as the black crystal blade. A little tweaking goes a long way. Start with a standard magic item and increase its power based on the adventurer's strengths and weaknesses. Take a close look at how the player has built the character. Create interesting, tactically useful, and flavorful items that fit snugly into your campaign and impart to the player a sense of being legendary.

Special Destinies

When my players cross over into the epic tier, I've decided to do something fun: I'm going to let them design their own epic destinies. Why? Well, if anything in the Dungeons & Dragons® game begs for the snowflake treatment, it's epic destinies.

How do you design an epic destiny? Any way you want, within reason.

An epic destiny contains a certain number of class features, an encounter power, and a daily power. You know how to spread them out, and you know their relative strengths. Now give each player four markers, tokens, or cards. Each one represents a power that the player can design—with the following requirement: Sometime during play, the power must help the character out of a jam, a crisis, or possibly even a near-death experience. Think of it as a Get Out of Jail Free card that creates a power and incorporates a gameplay element to boot.

The final power or feature of the epic destiny should be designed by you, however. Don't worry: It need not be perfect. If you discover that it has an exploitable loophole, come up with a judicious way to update it later. Don't worry about the mix of powers and features; rather, concentrate on making the package fit together naturally.

One last word of advice: Don't push it. If players don't want to create their own epic destinies, don't make them do it. It will feel like homework, and the players will not enjoy the process or the results.

Land and Title

As any longtime dungeon-delver will tell you, when designing your character, it's best to avoid alignment issues and family ties. Older editions of the game included spells that did extra damage to those of certain alignments, and, in every edition, having family has been an open invitation for the DM to screw with you.

Some players beg DMs to mess with them, or at least show no signs of trying to avoid it. You can spot them easily enough: They play paladins, inhabit antiheroes, or assume the role of the group's conscience. These lore-masters and note-takers enjoy being engaged in every aspect of your world—even when it puts them at odds with the rest of the group. Such a player is tailor-made for a land and title reward.

You can handle land and title several ways; in game terms, you should allow a character to manage an estate remotely so that it adds flavor but does not disrupt the main play session. One option is to play a land-and-trade board game, often called a Eurogame, during off-time, with the board game results representing the player's management of the estate. Alternatively, you could run a small skill challenge at the start of each session. Either way, build the results into your story.

Make land and title as complex or as simple as you want, but remember this one requirement: It must

include risks and rewards for the character. When the land produces resources, and a character remains in the court's good graces, rewards will follow. The adventurer might earn coin for a good crop, garner another title, or receive whatever else you deem appropriate. Conversely, when the fates turn, or famine strikes, the character might accumulate enough failure to lose a fortune or be branded a traitor. Indeed, such calamity could send the character back on the road in search of more treasure. After all, in politics, gold has the power to turn failure into success.

Cold Hard Cash

Cash might not sound special, but everyone likes it. Try awarding your characters a bunch of money and letting them spend it however they wish. Immediately, the players will start flipping through supplements, plotting and planning, and discussing and discarding strategies. Sometimes they'll ask crazy questions, such as ask how to receive land and title.

This approach has its dangers. Planning for combat synergy can devolve into bickering; depending on the maturity level of your group, you might need to set a few ground rules instead of letting them spend the gold however they want. The characters will also be a little tougher for a while, but you can use that fact as an excuse to throw tougher encounters at them.

The Last Word

The trick with special treasures is to make them suitable, unexpected, and, wherever possible, unique. While the baselines of the game exist to illustrate the treasure level that keeps the game running predictably, the system (and you) can handle spikes outside the normal bounds. It's fun to adjust to unexpected dynamics, and you'll find that your players will enjoy feeling special as well. Better yet, special treasures will give you more story hooks to play with when it comes time to prepare your weekly game.

Mailbag

Last month I complained that I was growing too fat. I said that there were too many munchies around the gaming table, and I asked you for help. Here are some of your responses.

Stand Up and Shout!

DM while standing. Standing for four hours is good exercise, and it helps you DM more energetically and be more involved. You can more easily reach miniatures, too. To remove temptation, make sure you don't have a chair nearby.

–Mvincent
From the Save My Game group

I'm going to stop short of hiding the chairs, but you offer good advice. In fact, I do this anyway. At the last Gen Con, my friends made fun of my tendency to stand up when I'm enjoying a game. When I'm really engaged, I start rocking from side to side.

Standing makes you feel more lively and attentive, and I enjoy not having to shout when I'm trying to talk to players. Mainly, though, I stand because I want to get deeper into the action. I don't want to miss details, so I view the field of battle from the best vantage point (I can't explain the rocking, though).

What can I say? The game feels different standing up. If I'm burning calories, too, that's even better.

Mind over Stomach . . . Sort of

I have one main suggestion to help you and your group avoid putting on weight from lengthy sitting and cheese ball eating: Don't game hungry.

I have my group meet an hour before the game. I typically cook (it's cheaper than ordering pizza), but you could order grinders from a local deli, a sushi platter from a local restaurant, or whatever else sounds good. Pizza isn't inherently bad either—it's a matter of toppings and portion control.

The group eats before I hand out character sheets. This system also allows the players to socialize a bit before we start playing.

–Scottevil912
From the board

This is the best advice. I've given the same counsel in the past, but have not been following it myself lately. Most gamers, including me, eat a lot of crap. We can keep on eating the crap, provided we limit the amount.

Everyone Loves a Cutesy Magic Item

One reader, Fkewl (love the name) brings the following magic item to his game. I don't know how effective it is, but it's worth a groan and a chuckle.

Good Meal Before Gaming Level 2+

A delicious meal is set before you. As you consume it, you sense the withdrawal of the Snack Monster.

Lvl 2	+1	520 gp	Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp
Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Weapon: Full stomach
Enhancement: Energy rolls and concentration rolls
Critical: +1d6 energy per plus

Power (Encounter): Free Action. *Trigger:* The Snack Monster targets you with an unhealthy snack. *Effect:* You are not tempted by the snack and ignore the Snack Monster's attack.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.

Reign of Despair

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 8-10

By Andrew G. Schneider

Illustrations by Lars Grant-West, Kerem Beyit, and Eva Widermann

Cartography by Sean Macdonald

Introduction

"Reign of Despair" takes place in the Shadowfell city of Gloomwrought, where a series of murders threatens to sunder a pair of young lovers and send their respective noble houses into war against one another. The heroes must navigate intrigue and the hazards of Gloomwrought in an attempt to keep open conflict from erupting in the city streets and to keep true love—so rare in this dismal realm—alive.

This Dungeons & Dragons® adventure is designed for characters of levels 8-10. It makes use of the Despair Deck and information in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™.

Adventure Background

Prince Rolan, the ruler of Gloomwrought, wants to start a war between the noble shadar-kai houses of

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Barrowmere and Umberfell to weaken them both. He asks Golthor, chieftain of the city's gargoyles, to make it happen. Golthor assigns the task to Shard, a gargoyle assassin, who begins murdering members of each house while framing the other house for each deed.

Golthor and Shard, however, have their own individual agendas. The gargoyles of Gloomwrought are bound to the city until Prince Rolan's reign is secure. Golthor plans to foster an alliance between various noble houses so that the city can truly be deemed secure (if only for a moment), thus releasing his tribe from its contract. For this reason, Golthor doesn't actually want Barrowmere and Umberfell to go to war. He gave the job to Shard specifically because he doubts the assassin can pull it off.

Shard, meanwhile, wants to supplant Golthor and sees the assignment as an opportunity to gain support from Prince Rolan. He hopes that by starting a war between the noble houses, he will prove his worth to the prince.

Unfortunately for Golthor, Shard has been effective in his murderous dealings so far. Unless that situation changes, war between the houses of Barrowmere and Umberfell will soon sweep through the streets of Gloomwrought, and Golthor will be ousted as the leader of the gargoyles.

Adventure Synopsis

Young lovers Izran Barrowmere and Amalia Umberfell are attempting to find refuge until the conflict between their houses blows over when they are attacked by assassins. Fortunately, the player characters are on hand to intervene.

Izran and Amalia believe that their parents are behind the killings and ask the characters to help stop the murders while they work toward a peace agreement. The characters have the opportunity to weaken one or both houses in an attempt to prevent further murders.

The Despair Deck

This adventure makes use of the Despair Deck featured in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*. If the players haven't already drawn despair cards at the start of the adventure, have each player draw a despair card at the end of the first encounter.

After the players draw their first despair cards during this adventure, you can then use the normal rules for the Despair Deck to determine when players draw or discard the cards. In addition, this adventure mentions several other points at which players might draw cards.

In spite of the characters' efforts, the killings continue. The characters uncover Shard's involvement, and the gargoyle hires a gang of thugs to ambush the adventurers in retaliation for their interference.

The houses prepare for war. Izran and Amalia ask the characters to help them stage a coup against their parents and unify Barrowmere and Umberfell in marriage. If the characters prevent the war, Golthor gives them a chance to bring Shard to justice.

Getting the Heroes Involved

Here are two ways the adventurers might become involved in the story.

- They hear about the murders and the trouble brewing between the houses. Wars between noble houses can last for years, and this one promises to be profitable for those who have the right skills.
- While walking Gloomwrought's streets, the heroes have the opportunity to commit a random act of kindness when Izran and Amalia are attacked, kicking off the adventure.

The Cast

This adventure features a number of important personalities, each described below.

Izran Barrowmere

Izran Barrowmere is the youngest scion of the Barrowmere family. His twin brother, Isilus, suffered from numerous health problems and one day fell ill with a hacking cough. Their father and patriarch, Cauldrus Barrowmere, took the sick boy away for treatment, but Isilus was declared dead shortly thereafter. In the weeks that followed, Izran noticed an increase in the sophistication and complexity of his father's undead creations, and he came to suspect his father of using his twin's life force to fuel his necromantic experiments. When confronted, Cauldrus claimed that Isilus had embraced his imminent death—as is expected of all shadar-kai—and gave what was left of his life to support the family. Izran ran away that day, and although he eventually returned to his place in the Barrowmere household, he never forgave what he saw as his twin's murder.

During his time scrounging on the streets, Izran ended up at the Plaza of Gargoyles and came under the protection of Golthor. There he met Amalia Umberfell, who had also left her noble family, and the two became fast friends. They maintained their friendship after both returned home, and in time, their relationship matured to love. Now, with their houses in danger of going to war, Izran has turned to Golthor for shelter once more. He hopes the chieftain can keep them safe until the trouble passes.

Izran excels at combat with a greatsword and takes enormous pride in the history of the Barrowmere house, although he disapproves of his father's leadership. He throws himself wholeheartedly into his interests and loves Amalia with unbridled passion. Izran holds himself to his ideals, but he is impulsive and often takes extreme measures to solve problems that might be resolved with more finesse.

Izran Barrowmere	**Level 8 Defender**
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP –
HP 67; **Bloodied** 33; **Healing Surges** 9	**Initiative** +5
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21	**Perception** +4
Speed 5	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2 to death saving throws	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Greatsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Izran's next turn.	
➢ **Longbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.	
⸸ **Sure Strike** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Precise Strike** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Izran teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of his next turn.	
Minor Actions	
Minor Resurgence ✦ **Encounter**	
Requirement: Izran must be bloodied.	
Effect: Izran gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Skills Diplomacy +12, Endurance +9	
Str 16 (+7) **Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+4)	
Con 10 (+4) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+7)	
Alignment good **Languages** Common	
Equipment scale armor, greatsword, longbow with 20 arrows	

COMPANION CHARACTERS

Izran and Amalia can accompany the party on some of the encounters in this adventure, acting as unique companion characters. If they do so, allow the players to control their actions in combat using the provided statistics. Unlike ordinary companion characters, Izran and Amalia do not share in rewards that the party receives. (For more information about companion characters, see *Dungeon Master's Guide*® 2, page 27.)

If the characters favor bringing Izran and Amalia along, make sure they appreciate the importance of keeping the young nobles alive. If one or both of them is killed in combat, the repercussions are far-reaching (see "Aftermath," page 25).

Amalia Umberfell

Amalia Umberfell is the willful youngest daughter of Devina, matriarch of the Umberfell house. Amalia was destined for the clergy, pledged at a young age to the sisters of Raven's Eyrie. With a natural aptitude for nethermancy, Amalia used her command of shadows to escape the Eyrie not once, but seven times. During her final escape, she took shelter with Golthor among the roofs of the Plaza of Gargoyles, where she met and befriended her fellow runaway, Izran.

The seventh escape was considered by the clergy to be a sign from the Raven Queen that Amalia was not destined to be one of the priesthood, and she was returned to her family. Devina took her daughter as an apprentice but was neither kind nor forgiving. She thought only of the prestige the family could have enjoyed if an Umberfell had risen in the ranks of the Raven Queen's own. Amalia never forgave her mother for trying to force her away from nethermancy, which she sees as her calling.

The young girl's spirited personality comes across as energetic to some and unthinking or cruel to others. Her tastes and interests change with alarming regularity. The only constants in her life are her devotion to nethermancy, her enduring fondness for "uncle" Golthor, and her fierce, protective love of Izran. She complements Izran's high-minded ideals and impulsive nature with a stark, calculating view of the world.

Amalia Umberfell	**Level 8 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP –
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24; **Healing Surges** 6	**Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21	**Perception** +6
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2 to death saving throws	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 3 damage.	
➢ **Magic Missile** (force) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Ranged 20 (one creature). The target takes 7 damage.	
⸸ **Unraveling Darts** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d4 + 9 damage. If the target has vulnerability to any damage types, the damage is each of those types. If the target has no vulnerabilities, Amalia gains a +2 power bonus to the damage roll.	
➢ **Ray of Enfeeblement** (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d10 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of Amalia's next turn.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Amalia teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
Shield ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: Amalia is hit by an attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Amalia gains a +4 power bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of her next turn.	
Skills Arcana +14	
Str 8 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+6)	
Con 10 (+4) **Int** 20 (+9) **Cha** 10 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment dagger	

Golthor

When Prince Rolan came to power, he tricked Golthor and his tribe into guarding the Plaza of Gargoyles until such time as the prince's rule in Gloomwrought was secure. With the city's fractious array of noble houses plotting against Rolan and one another, it does not seem likely that the prince's rule will ever be considered secure—at least, not without help. But Golthor has a plan.

The gargoyle chieftain hopes to foster cooperation among the powerful houses. If he can cause the nobles to halt their conflicts, there might be peace across the city, if only for a moment. That would satisfy the gargoyles' contract—in letter if not in spirit—and the tribe would be free to return to the Elemental Chaos.

Golthor encouraged and facilitated Izran and Amalia's friendship, and he planned for their love to unite their houses. An end to the acrimony between Barrowmere and Umberfell would be an important step toward citywide peace.

The murders committed by Shard have put that plan in jeopardy, but Golthor dares not act openly against Prince Rolan or the members of his own tribe. He must appear to be following Rolan's orders while secretly trying to prevent a war. The appearance of the characters changes everything. Through them, Golthor hopes to quell the nobles' conflict before it escalates. If all goes well, he might be able to unite the houses through their scions and block the ambitious Shard from gaining too much power.

Golthor has trouble expressing subtleties, and if he can't say something directly, he prefers to remain silent. He is proud to a fault and will not be the first to mention the contract between Rolan and the gargoyles.

Golthor, Gargoyle Chieftain — **Level 12 Brute (Leader)**
Large elemental humanoid (earth) — XP 700

HP 118; **Bloodied** 59 — **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23 — **Perception** +15
Speed 6, fly 8 — Darkvision

Traits

Stone-Rending Claws
Golthor's attacks ignore all resistances.

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d6 + 11 damage.

Into the Fray ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and Golthor pushes the target up to 3 squares. If the target ends this push adjacent to any of Golthor's allies, one of them can make a melee basic attack against the target as an immediate reaction.

Wing Buffet ✦ Encounter
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 5d6 + 11 damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Golthor can push the target 1 square.

Minor Actions

Stone Armor ✦ Recharge when first bloodied
Effect: Close burst 1 (allies in the burst). Golthor and each target gain 10 temporary hit points, and Golthor gains a +4 power bonus to AC until the end of his next turn.

Skills Stealth +15

Str 22 (+12)	**Dex** 18 (+10)	**Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 8 (+5)	**Cha** 15 (+8)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Common, Primordial

Cauldrus and House Barrowmere

House Barrowmere has fallen on hard times despite being home to an ancient line of shadar-kai necromancers. In recent decades, the house's investments have stagnated, its fortunes have been reversed, and the number of surviving family members has plummeted. Aside from a small retainer of living servants and guards, the halls of House Barrowmere are filled with the echoing moans of the undead.

The manor is in a state of constant disrepair, exacerbated by the mania of a former patriarch who emptied much of the family's coffers to build a series of towers to rival those of Raven's Eyrie. When the completed towers failed to live up to his expectations, the patriarch leapt from them to his death.

The Barrowmeres have been creating and storing undead beneath the manor grounds for centuries. If the living family members roused the entirety of their undead army from its torpor, it would be a force to be reckoned with.

The current patriarch, Cauldrus Barrowmere, is more of a maniacal recluse than many of his ancestors. In his youth, he carried on a brief, intense affair with Devina Umberfell until familial expectations and their own personalities tore them apart. Ever since his wife Emera died in childbirth, Cauldrus has been obsessed with blurring the connection between life and undeath. He plans to turn himself into a living-undead hybrid, removing all mortal frailty from his body without succumbing to the messy path of lichdom.

Cauldrus takes little interest in the rest of his family, caring only that enough living relatives remain to fuel his experiments. Thus, the recent murders have been most inconvenient. The patriarch is uncertain of his ability to foster more children, and he wants Izran to return to the manor.

Other notable members of House Barrowmere include the following individuals. Everen appears as a minor character on the second day of the adventure; you can develop the other two personalities as you see fit.

Everen: Izran's older brother and only surviving sibling. Everen handles the day-to-day affairs of the house while his father is busy with his experiments. He blames House Umberfell for Barrowmere's decline, and the recent murders have reinforced his acrimony. Everen respects Izran's drive and focus,

disapproves of his dalliance with Amalia, and puts no faith in accusations of their father's malevolence.

Clay: Head of the guard—or what little is left of it. A shadar-kai chainfighter who uses the quiet of the Barrowmere household to perfect his fighting style, Clay is often found in the manor courtyard, dueling his own shadow.

Myrtle: A middle-aged shadowborn human, she is the Barrowmeres' cook, maid, and all-purpose servant. Myrtle bustles through the manor, keeping the house from falling apart entirely. She also keeps the undead in line.

Devina and House Umberfell

House Umberfell is in decline. Once a leader in nethermantic research, the house lost its edge when recent generations grew content to rest upon past successes. Devina Umberfell, the matriarch, hopes to reverse that trend and return to her family the clout and respect it deserves. The key to Umberfell's resurgence is a pool of living shadow, the Darkwell, from which the family's nethermancers draw power.

Although Devina's goals for the restoration of her house are laudable, they stem from deep-rooted paranoia. She is afraid of laconic Prince Rolan, the suspiciously reclusive Barrowmeres, and her daughter Amalia's growing mastery of nethermancy. Most of all, she is afraid of Gloomwrought. The mutable inconstancy of the city terrifies her and has prompted her desperate plan to take control of the Shadowheart—the mysterious cavern below Prince Rolan's Deathless Palace. She believes the Darkwell is a conduit to the cavern and a means through which the city can be manipulated. If she can gain control of Gloomwrought's life force, she can ensure that the city never turns against her.

Devina's paranoid obsessions accentuate her tendency to micromanage, and she interferes with nearly every aspect of daily life at Umberfell Manor. The mansion is populated, but a casual observer wouldn't know it. The servants go about their business in a hush and return to their rooms or roam the city streets, fearful that the shadows are spying on them. Meanwhile, Devina's children and relatives seek refuge from her surveillance in Gloomwrought's brothels and gambling parlors, frittering away the family fortune—at least, they did until the recent murders left most of them dead in a gutter.

For all that she fears her family members, Devina loves them rabidly. Someone is striking at Umberfell, and signs point increasingly to her old lover, Cauldrus Barrowmere. She dumped him decades ago, and Devina believes that he is now taking his revenge. As such, she has accelerated her research and spent the remaining Umberfell fortune to hire vampires from the Charnel Fangs as guards. Soon, Devina is sure, the city will swallow Barrowmere whole, and she will be safe.

Other notable members of House Umberfell include the following individuals. Marice appears as a minor character on the second day of the adventure; you can develop the other two personalities as you see fit.

Marice: Amalia's older sister is the other surviving member of the Umberfell family. With her relatives' deaths and Amalia's disappearance, Marice has found new purpose in returning Umberfell to prosperity and extricating the family from Devina's paralyzing clutches. Marice has taken hold of the family finances, begun dismissing the Charnel Fangs, and countermanded her mother's orders behind her back. There have been arguments—thunderous, manor-shaking arguments—which, left unchecked, could lead to Marice being banished or Devina being ousted as house matriarch.

Ilyana: Leader of the group of Charnel Fangs hired by Devina, Ilyana was an apprentice wizard in life and is fascinated by the matriarch's manipulation of shadow magic.

Irmeth: The Umberfell's revenant butler, he asserts that the Raven Queen returned him from death to serve House Umberfell. He is the only servant who doesn't fear Devina's shadows because, curiously, he doesn't have one of his own.

Shard

The gargoyle Shard came to Gloomwrought with Golthor three hundred years ago and gradually discovered that not only did he enjoy the grim atmosphere of the Shadowfell, he also thrived in it. Fifty years ago, Shard was recruited by the Tenebrous Cabal to serve its interests. The group gave him a magic crystal—a shard of shadow—that granted him limited command of shadow magic. The crystal has the following powers.

- ✦ It allows Shard to create magical nooses of shadow, which he has been using to frame House Umberfell for the Barrowmere murders.
- ✦ It can enhance Shard's abilities in combat, granting him partial concealment until the end of the encounter, as well as 2 action points per day.
- ✦ If Shard breaks the crystal, its magic will teleport him to a safe house run by the Tenebrous Cabal. Shard has been cautioned to use this ability only in desperation, since a new crystal will not be granted lightly.

Shard keeps the crystal on his person at all times and has carved a special holster for it in the palm of his right hand.

Shard believes that the gargoyles of Gloomwrought could gain great influence if they simply accepted their position in the city, and he has been working toward supplanting Golthor. To that end, he eagerly accepted the assignment to set Barrowmere and Umberfell against each other, hoping that success will earn him favor in Prince Rolan's eyes.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The immediate lead-up to the war between House Barrowmere and House Umberfell occurs over three days. The events of the adventure unfold in chronological order, as described below. Two encounters that can happen at any time, Gathering Information and The Vistani Caravan, are presented at the end of the adventure.

Day 1

At the outset of the adventure, the characters find themselves abruptly thrust into the brewing conflict. They end the day on a mission of subterfuge and discovery.

Event 1.1: A Wild Ride

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,200 XP)

Whether the characters are looking for work in Gloomwrought or just traveling through the city, they happen to be nearby when Izran and Amalia's carriage is ambushed by Shard's lackeys.

Perception DC 17: The character hears the clattering of a fast carriage and a female's scream coming from a nearby street.

Light: Dim light; the weak illumination from the sun is largely blocked by the surrounding buildings.

Monsters: 2 street golems, 3 shadow stranglers.

When you're ready to begin, read:

All around you, the city streets convulse without warning. Buildings gyrate and collapse as the road literally rises to meet you, the cobblestones forming lumbering, humanoid shapes.

The city has birthed a pair of hostile street golems in the characters' path. In the aftermath of the upheaval, two fresh alleyways, steaming with hot rubble, now lead to a nearby street running in the same direction.

Izran's large carriage careens toward the parallel street, his horse blinded by the shadows' attacks. Izran drives the carriage while Amalia hides within.

At the end of round 1, the carriage skids along the street running parallel to the characters' location and tips over between the two new alleyways.

When one of the characters sees the carriage, read:

A young male shadar-kai wielding a greatsword is locked in combat with a trio of flitting shadows atop an overturned carriage. The animated skeleton of a horse kicks feebly from within its harness, half its bones broken.

Amalia's screams are coming from the carriage. Izran, who is wearing fine clothes beneath a heavy cloak, asks the characters for their assistance against the shadows. If the characters do not seem immediately inclined to help, Izran offers his family's signet ring as a reward.

With a DC 25 Perception check, the characters see a pale, feminine hand emerge from the carriage window and shoot a ray of energy at their assailants.

Buildings: The surrounding buildings are 50 feet high. They are covered in ornamental stonework typical of Gloomwrought's architecture and can be climbed with a DC 12 Athletics check.

Carriage: The overturned carriage takes up a 2-square-by-3-square space and is difficult terrain.

Izran and Amalia: If a shadow strangler ends its turn next to the carriage, it takes 5 damage from Izran's greatsword. If a shadow strangler ends its turn not adjacent to the carriage but in Amalia's line of sight, it takes 7 force damage from Amalia's *magic missile*. This damage ignores the shadow stranglers'

insubstantial trait. Neither Izran nor Amalia attacks the street golems.

Steaming Rubble: Any creature that ends its turn in the rubble of the new alleyways takes 5 fire damage. The rubble is also difficult terrain.

Treasure: Whether the characters demand payment or not, Izran rewards them with his bejeweled family ring, worth 1,000 gp.

Tactics: The street golems attack the nearest character without forethought, ignoring Izran, Amalia, and the shadow stranglers. Each of the shadow stranglers focuses its attention on Izran until it is attacked by the heroes, at which point that monster divides its attacks between Izran and the characters. The shadow stranglers and the street golems do not consider each other allies.

Shard

Shard summoned the shadow stranglers and ordered them to kill Izran and Amalia. He circles overhead during the battle, noting the characters' interference, then flies away, unwilling to risk being discovered. A character who makes a DC 25 Perception check during or immediately after the combat notices his shadowed, winged form.

When the encounter ends, Shard returns to the Plaza of Gargoyles, complaining to his cronies about the meddlesome adventurers. Golthor overhears Shard's comments and starts keeping an eye out for the characters, thinking they might be useful to his plans.

Izran and Amalia

After the shadows and golems are defeated, Izran helps Amalia from the carriage and rewards—or pays—the characters. The nobles introduce themselves and relate the following story of their feuding houses as they understand it.

In recent weeks, most of Izran's remaining relatives have been killed by shadow magic, a hallmark of the Umberfell family.

Within that same period, most of Amalia's relatives have also been murdered. Witnesses said they were killed from above by large, flying monsters.

OPEN WAR

The adventure assumes that the heroes decide to help Izran and Amalia stop the burgeoning war between their houses. However, Gloomwrought is a large, complicated city, and a number of events might compete for the characters' attention. If they leave the young nobles to their own devices, you can still use the adventure, with the following modifications.

- Without the characters' intervention, the house war spills into the streets, making travel through the city more treacherous. The party encounters hostile groups of undead, such as those detailed in Event 1.3, from both sides of the conflict. Without intervention, the war could rage for years.
- Flush from his success in starting the war, Shard takes over as chieftain of the gargoyles. Exiled from the tribe, Golthor goes into hiding with Izran and Amalia. He still hopes to break the contract with Rolan someday. In the meantime, he works with the young lovers to bring peace to their houses.
- You will need to change the reasoning behind some of the encounters, but the Umberfell Darkwell and the Barrowmere nests remain valuable targets for a small strike team looking to disrupt the houses' operations.

Cauldrus Barrowmere recently created a group of undead creatures that match that description.

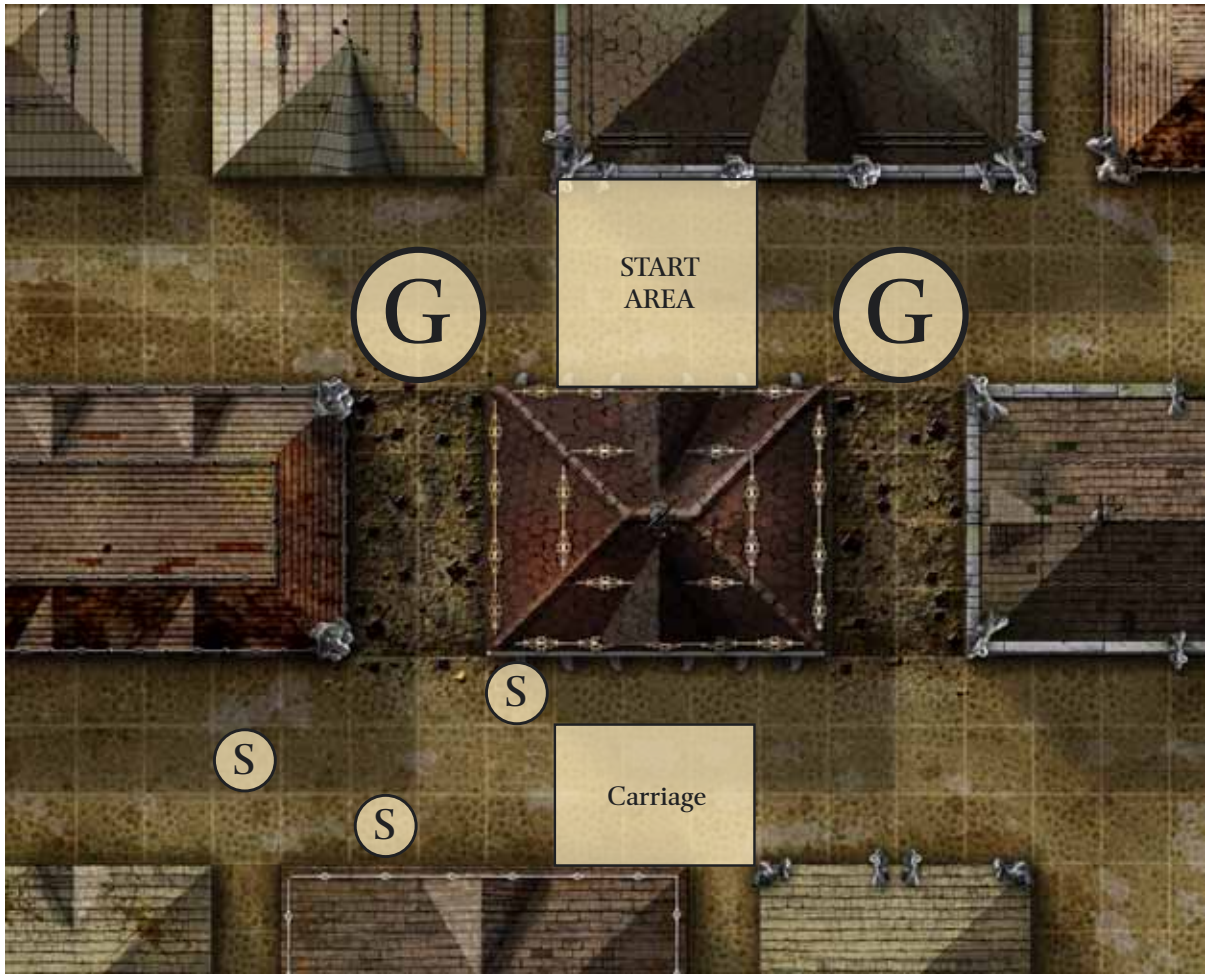
Izran and Amalia ask the characters for an escort to the Plaza of Gargoyles, where they hope to find safety with their old friend Golthor. If the heroes seek payment, Izran is willing to reward them, but only if the characters also agree to help him stop the murders.

If the characters mention the creature they spotted flying overhead during or after the battle, Izran jumps to the conclusion that it is one of his father's creations.

Development

If the characters agree to escort Izran and Amalia, go to Event 1.2. If they decide otherwise, see the "Open War" sidebar for suggestions on how to proceed.

2 Street Golems (G)		**Level 10 Soldier**
Large natural animate (construct)		XP 500 each
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26		**Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22		**Perception** +8
Speed 7		Darkvision
Resist 10 to all damage		
Traits		
☼ **Loose Cobbles** ✦ **Aura** 2		
Squares in the aura are difficult terrain for enemies.		
Plodding		
The golem cannot shift.		
Standard Actions		
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**		
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 10 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the golem's next turn.		
⇙ **Street's Clutches** ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅		
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).		
Str 21 (+10)	**Dex** 12 (+6)	**Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 17 (+8)	**Int** 3 (+1)	**Cha** 3 (+1)
Alignment unaligned	**Languages** –	



3 Shadow Stranglers (S)	**Level 9 Artillery**
Medium shadow humanoid	XP 400 each
HP 53; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22	**Perception** +6
Speed 8	Darkvision
Resist insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	

Traits

Born of Shadows

The strangler can make a Stealth check to become hidden when it has concealment instead of needing total concealment.

Standard Actions

Shadowy Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the strangler becomes invisible to the target until the end of the strangler's next turn.

Blinding Shadows (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target cannot see anything more than 3 squares away from it until the end of the strangler's next turn.

Strangling Darkness (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is restrained and takes ongoing 15 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Devouring Dark (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**

Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the strangler's next turn.

Miss: Half damage.

Skills Arcana +10, Stealth +13

Str 12 (+5)	**Dex** 19 (+8)	**Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 12 (+5)	**Cha** 19 (+8)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Event 1.2: Plaza of Gargoyles

Roleplaying Encounter

Entering the Plaza of Gargoyles gives the party its first chance to get a good look at Shard, although that opportunity is merely a backdrop to meeting Golthor and continuing the conversation with Izran and Amalia. When the characters arrive at the plaza, the gargoyles are breaking up a fight started by a pair of competing merchants.

Light: Torches illuminate the plaza with bright light.

When the characters arrive on the scene, read:
A brawl is raging in the Plaza of Gargoyles, engulfing several market stalls and dozens of bystanders. The gargoyles are intervening, wading indiscriminately into the conflict. Most of them are throwing rocks or using their claws to separate the attackers. One gargoyle grins savagely as he spins webs of pure shadow from a black crystal in his hands, catching and strangling the brawlers.

The gargoyle nethermancer is Shard. A character who makes a DC 17 Perception check notices that Shard eyes the heroes intently for a moment before returning to his work. The fight ends shortly after the characters' arrival, and Shard flies away.

If the characters have escorted Izran and Amalia to the plaza, the young nobles lead them into a house along the northern edge of the marketplace, up the stairs, through the attic, and through a secret door in the roof. Golthor's roost is a few steps away.

If the characters enter the plaza alone, Golthor intercepts them at the edge of the area and gives them instructions on how to reach his roost. He would like to speak with them.

Izran and Amalia

With the characters' help, Izran and Amalia believe they can stop the murders and arrange a truce. The young nobles can provide the following information.

Their two families have been traditional rivals, but Cauldrus and Devina openly hated each other following their breakup decades ago. It was thought that they had moved past those feelings, but apparently their mutual acrimony was simmering under the surface.

Izran believes that the key to stopping the murders is to destroy the tools used to commit the crimes—the Barrowmere nests and the Umberfell Darkwell. Their parents would not dare to reveal their involvement by taking direct action. If the murder weapons are neutralized, Everen and Marice might be able to hold peace talks.

The tower nests took years to create, and Izran suspects they also cost the lives of some of the Barrowmere family. The nests enabled the creation of the creatures that now roost there. Destroy the nests and the creatures, and neither would be replaced easily.

Amalia will provide a magical creation called a *lightseed* with which to poison her mother's Darkwell. She would not be sorry to see the Darkwell destroyed, believing it to be a crutch that no true nethermancer should require.

Izran and Amalia recommend that the characters wait until nightfall, when most of the servants will have retired and it will be easier to slip into the manors undetected. In the meantime, the characters have several hours in which to prepare or undertake other activities.

With a DC 25 Diplomacy check, a character can convince Izran or Amalia to accompany the party on the missions. The nobles insist on going in disguise, since no one can know that they are sabotaging their parents' schemes.

IF THE NOBLES HELP

If the characters decide to visit only one of the houses tonight, Izran and Amalia take it upon themselves to go to the other house. The young nobles are successful, and the adventure proceeds as if the characters had completed that encounter (except, of course, they don't receive any XP or treasure).

Golthor

Golthor is impressed with the characters and provides whatever assistance he can without working directly against the other gargoyles. He hides the fact that he gave Shard the job of starting a war, hoping that the assassin would fail. With a DC 25 Insight check, a character can deduce that Golthor is both extremely worried and optimistic about the characters' intervention.

If the characters ask about the gargoyle they saw in the plaza, Golthor reveals only that the individual's name is Shard and that he is one of the most formidable members of the tribe.

Event 1.3: Infiltration

Skill Challenge Level 9 (1,200 XP)

Both the Barrowmere and the Umberfell manors are large, sprawling complexes that have been decaying for years. In each house, a maze of corridors, rooftops, and rooms greets visitors. Barrowmere Manor is crumbling and decrepit, filled with too few living souls, too many undead, and the remnants of past glory. Umberfell Manor is stark, severe, and full of shadows where even the mice are afraid to squeak.

This skill challenge comes into play twice; once when the adventurers infiltrate Umberfell Manor, and again when they visit Barrowmere Manor to pursue the leads that Izran and Amalia have provided. They must use their abilities to avoid sporadic patrols or wandering inhabitants. At your discretion, the characters can encounter some of a manor's notable residents as part of a skill challenge or as the consequences of failed checks.

TALKING TO CAULDRUS AND DEVINA

At this point in the adventure, Cauldrus Barrowmere and Devina Umberfell are moving about their respective manors, busy with their research. The characters, if they so desire, can meet and talk to them. After the characters explain their presence and establish that they are not assassins, Cauldrus and Devina are willing to entertain them for a few moments.

Each family's leader blames the other for the murders and truthfully denies any wrongdoing or retaliation. Neither bears lingering ill will toward the other for their long-ago affair. They would rather see their houses at peace so they can focus on their magical research.

In addition, they would like their wayward children, Izran and Amalia, returned home. A character who makes a DC 25 Insight check in Cauldrus's presence suspects that his desire to see his son is due not to love or familial devotion but to something more sinister.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (1,200 XP).

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per 5 minutes.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Athletics, Bluff, Stealth, Thievery.

Arcana (DC 25, two successes maximum): The character can sense the presence of magic traps and alarms before they are triggered, or the character can manipulate magic shadows to hide the party from sight. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge.

Athletics (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character scales a wall or takes to the rooftops to get a better sense of the manor's crazed layout. While doing so, he or she might discover a less obvious route across the complex. A character who gets a result of 25 or higher on this check can choose to remove a failure that has been earned in the challenge rather than count the result as a success.

Bluff (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character talks his or her way past a frightened servant or a bored sentry. A result of 25 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one, and the character manages to gain directions to his or her destination in the process.

Stealth (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character slips past a crowded room and scouts an alternative route for the rest of the party.

Thievery (DC 25, two successes maximum): The character opens a locked door, allowing the party to move through an abandoned section of the manor.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Perception, Religion.

Dungeoneering (DC 17): The character spots flaws in the structural integrity of an area, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Athletics check in the challenge.

Perception (DC 17): The character notices a secret door or hears someone approaching, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Stealth check or Thievery check in the challenge.

Religion (DC 17, usable in Barrowmere Manor only): The character provides insight into the behavior of the less intelligent undead that populate the manor, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Bluff check in the challenge.

Special: If Izran or Amalia is present, the party gains a +2 bonus to all checks made in the challenge.

Success: The characters arrive at their destination or find whom they seek without further problems.

Failure: The characters are noticed by a group of hungry undead (in Barrowmere Manor) or bored vampire guards looking for a fight (in Umberfell Manor). Each character loses a healing surge in the ensuing scuffle, and that character's player draws a despair card. Alternatively, you can run one of the following encounters in a close grouping of hallways and rooms. You can find the ghasts in *Monster Manual*® 3 and all other monsters in *Monster Vault*™.

- Barrowmere Manor: 4 ghasts, 6 moldering mummies (level 8 encounter; 1,750 XP)
- Umberfell Manor: 1 master vampire, 1 vampire night witch, 5 elder vampire spawn (level 8 encounter; 1,825 XP)

Treasure: None.

Event 1.4: The Darkwell

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,450 XP)

The Darkwell is hidden in a remote corner of a neglected greenhouse attached to Umberfell Manor. Unknown to Amalia, Devina has engaged a small family of dryads and their treant companions to guard the greenhouse against intruders.

Perception DC 17: A character hears soft giggling. Also, several large trees appear to be mobile.

Light: Dim light shines from the moon high overhead.

Monsters: 3 bramblewood treants, 2 dryad hunters, 1 dryad witch.

When the characters approach Umberfell Manor, read:

Beneath banks of dirty skylights, thorny plants spread their grasping fronds amid a series of neglected paths and five overgrown statues of shadar-kai warriors.

The party can enter the greenhouse through the doors at the top of the map, break a window (Strength DC 12) to gain access, or drop through the skylights that extend across the ceiling. The skylights are 100 feet above the ground.

The dryads and treants hide in the dense foliage near the statutes and attempt to ambush the party.

When a character gets a clear view of the Darkwell, read:

A large well filled with black, viscous liquid sits in an unobstructed area between patches of overgrowth. The liquid bubbles and roils and emanates intense cold.

Plants: The plants are difficult terrain and provide partial concealment.

Statues: The statues are blocking terrain.

Darkwell: The Darkwell is a direct conduit to the Shadowheart. The well is filled with a dark liquid similar to that in the Gloomwrought fountain known as the Dark Lady. A creature that starts its turn in the Darkwell takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). If the liquid is splashed or thrown, it turns to dark red dust that looks like dried blood. A creature that starts its turn carrying some of the liquid takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends, at which point the liquid turns to dust).

Treasure: If the dryads are defeated, they leave behind a level 10 uncommon or rare magic item.

Lore: The dryads and the treants are from the Feywild. Years ago, they accidentally stumbled through a shadow crossing and emerged near Gloomwrought. They were eking out an existence in the fetid Skins when Devina Umberfell offered them a better place to live in exchange for their services. The Shadowfell has left these creatures depressed and fatalistic, and although they would love to return to the Feywild, they have lost nearly all hope of ever doing so. In the meantime, they have turned the greenhouse into a grim mockery of their Feywild grove. From their use of the corpses of servants and thieves that accidentally wandered into the greenhouse over the years, the dryads and treants discovered that the plants of the Shadowfell grow best on a steady diet of blood.

Tactics: The fey take their job of guarding the Darkwell seriously, but they have found a new appetite for blood. They do their best to keep the party from approaching the Darkwell until one of the characters becomes bloodied, at which point they focus all their attention on the bloodied character and disregard any other character who comes close to the liquid.

When the *lightseed* blossoms into a portal (see below), the fey abandon the fight. Any surviving dryads leap through the portal, leaving dead or unconscious allies behind. The treants attempt to gather their fallen before returning home.

The Lightseed

The *lightseed* the characters received from Amalia appears to be a shard of pure radiance the size and weight of a sunflower seed. Amalia created it as a pet project years ago while exploring the nature of the radiant power that is nethermancy's progenitor and opposite. She believes the *lightseed* will shut down the Darkwell but is unaware of any other effects it might have. If it is uncovered, the *lightseed* provides bright illumination in a 20-square radius.

If a character adjacent to the Darkwell drops the seed in the well, it germinates, spreading roots and tendrils to break up the shadows. After 5 rounds, the *lightseed* blossoms into a temporary portal to the Feywild.

With a DC 17 Arcana check, a character can recognize the opening portal for what it is. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Nature check or Heal check as a standard action while adjacent to the Darkwell can hasten the portal's growth by 1 round per successful check.

Several minutes after the *lightseed* portal opens, Gloomwrought severs its connection to the corrupted Darkwell. The blossom withers and dies, and the portal closes.

THROUGH THE PORTAL

If the characters jump through the *lightseed* portal, they end up in the glorious eladrin city of Mithrendain. In many ways Gloomwrought's opposite, Mithrendain is a city of life and light (see "Mithrendain, Citadel of the Feywild" in *Dragon* 366). It's up to you to decide whether the characters can return to Gloomwrought and finish what they started before events move beyond them. See the "Open War" sidebar for tips on how the adventure might progress during the party's absence.

3 Bramblewood Treants (T)	Level 10 Soldier
Large fey magical beast (plant)	XP 500 each
HP 108; **Bloodied** 54	**Initiative** +9
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 24	**Perception** +11
Speed 8 (forest walk)	Low-light vision

Traits

☼ Bramble Branches ✦ Aura 2

Enemies treat squares within the aura as difficult terrain.

Wooden Body

Whenever the treant takes fire damage, it also takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Standard Actions

⊕ Slam ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 12 damage.
Effect: The treant marks the target until the end of the treant's next turn.

Throw Stone ✦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.

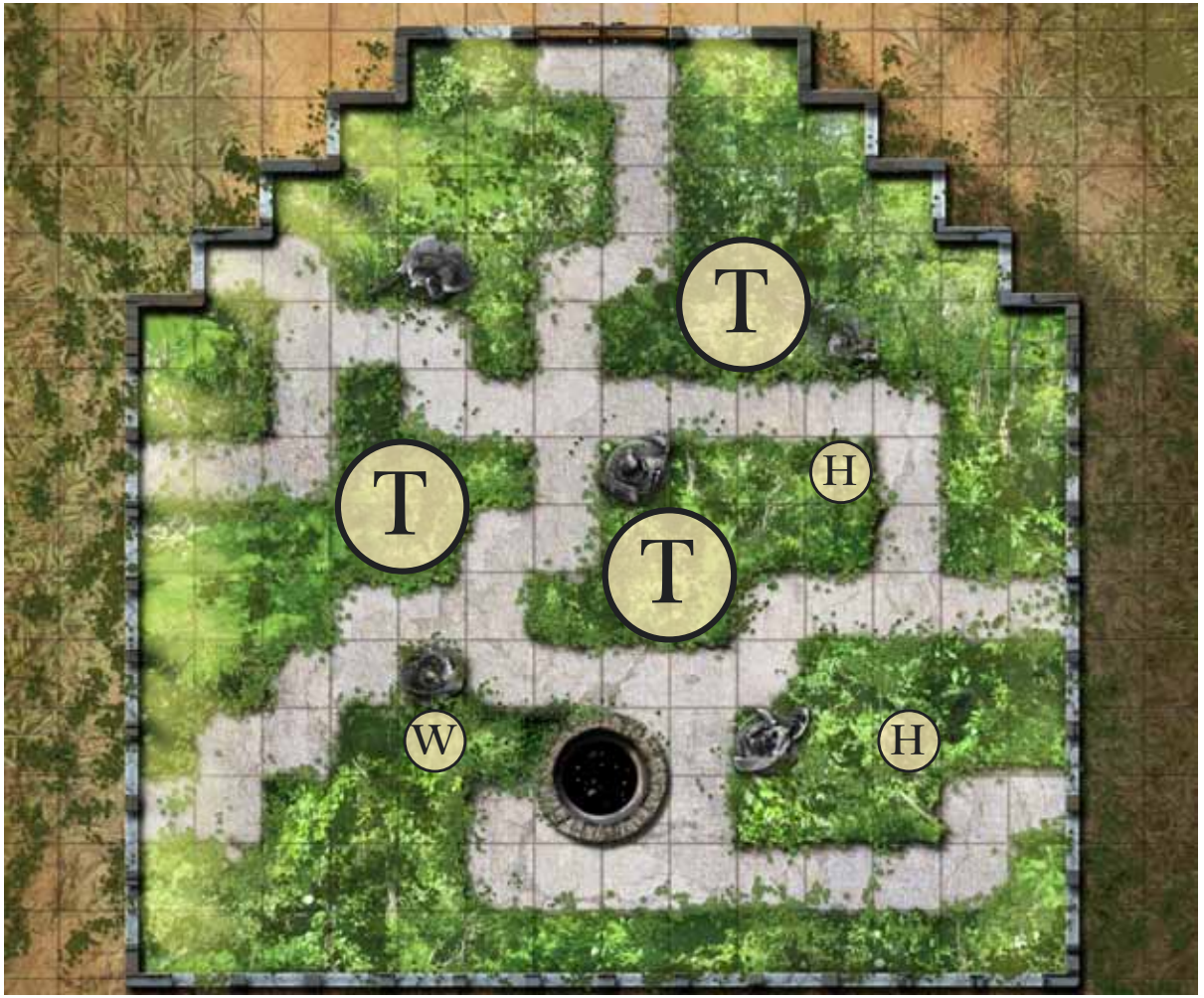
Triggered Actions

Entangling Branch ✦ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy within 2 squares of the treant moves.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: The treant grabs the target (escape DC 18).

Str 21 (+10)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 22 (+11)
Con 20 (+10)	**Int** 14 (+7)	**Cha** 12 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Elven



2 Dryad Hunters (H)	Level 7 Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid (plant)	XP 300 each
HP 82; **Bloodied** 41	**Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18	**Perception** +10
Speed 8 (forest walk)	
Standard Actions	
⨁ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, or 3d8 + 8 if no other enemy is adjacent to the dryad.	
Luring Feint ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The dryad uses *claw*. If the attack hits, the dryad shifts up to 4 squares, pulling the target with it. If the attack misses, the dryad shifts up to its speed.	
Move Actions	
Treestride (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The dryad must be adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Effect: The dryad teleports up to 8 squares to a square adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Minor Actions	
Deceptive Veil (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The dryad disguises itself to appear as a Medium humanoid (usually a beautiful elf or eladrin) until it uses *deceptive veil* again or until it drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 28 Insight check to discern that the form is an illusion.	
Str 16 (+6) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+5)	
Con 18 (+7) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 13 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Elven	

Dryad Witch (W)	Level 8 Controller
Medium fey humanoid (plant)	XP 350
HP 84; **Bloodied** 42	**Initiative** +7
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22	**Perception** +14
Speed 8 (forest walk)	
Standard Actions	
⨁ **Thorny Vine** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.	
Effect: The dryad can slide the target 1 square.	
Beguiling Verdure (charm) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one dazed creature); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: The dryad slides the target up to the target's speed, and the target must then make a basic attack as a free action against a creature of the dryad's choice.	
Soporific Fragrance (charm) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dazed (save ends).	
Move Actions	
Treestride (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The dryad must be adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Effect: The dryad teleports up to 8 squares to a square adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Minor Actions	
Deceptive Veil (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The dryad disguises itself to appear as a Medium humanoid (usually a beautiful elf or eladrin) until it uses *deceptive veil* again or until it drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 29 Insight check to discern that the form is an illusion.	
Str 11 (+4) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 20 (+9)	
Con 12 (+5) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Elven	

Event 1.5: The Nests

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,600 XP)

The towers stretching high above Barrowmere Manor are a home and a focus for the powerful necromantic experiments of Cauldrus Barrowmere.

Perception DC 17: A character spots large winged skeletons, dripping with rotting flesh, curled up in the nests. A result of 25 or higher on this check enables the character to spot numerous arcane symbols carved into the bones of the nests.

Light: Dim light shines from the moon high overhead.

Monsters: 2 young earthquake dragons, 2 young volcanic dragons.

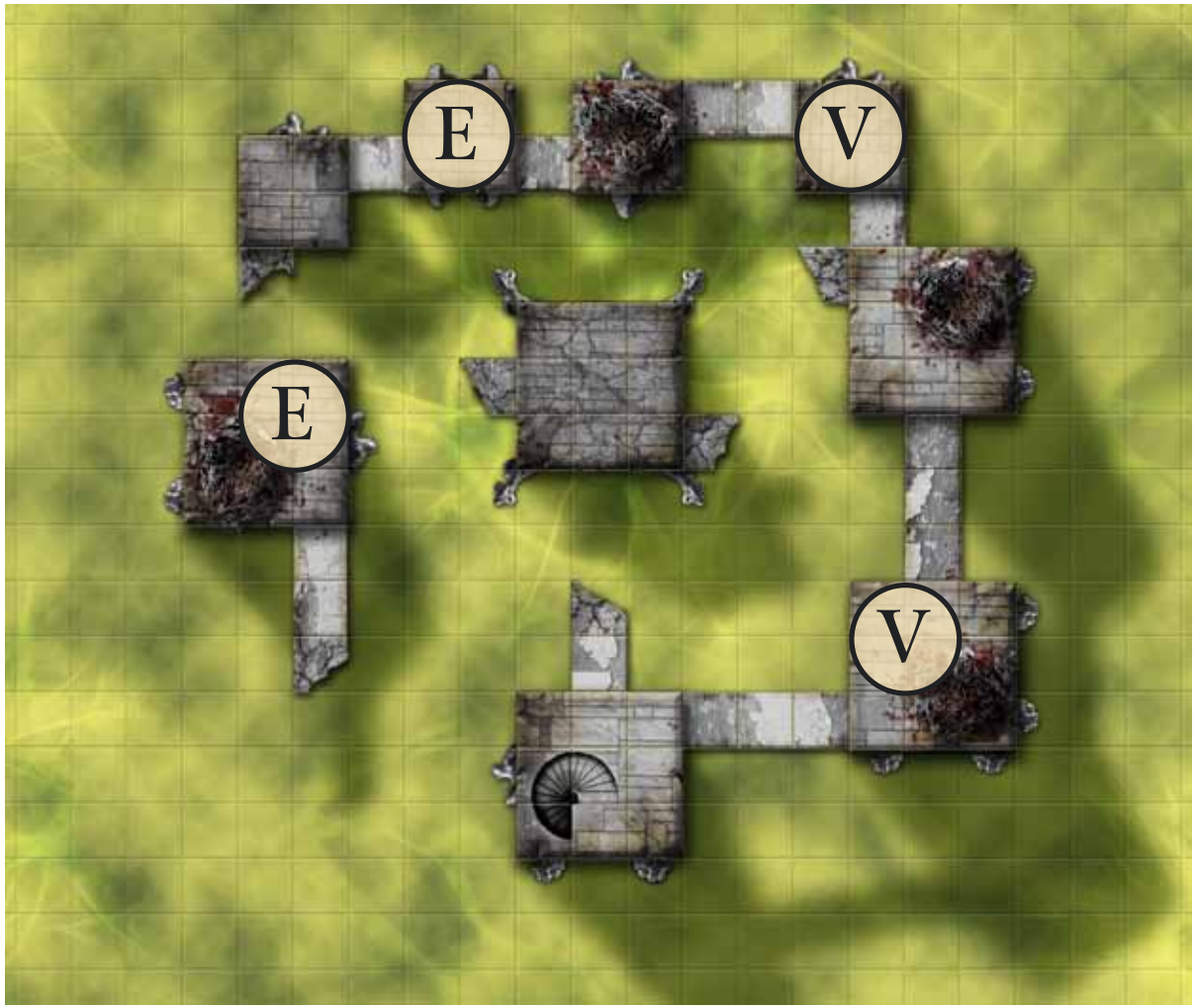
When the characters approach Barrowmere Manor, read:

Towers reach like a set of crooked fingers above the sickly green fog that has blown in with the tide. Nests of bone and stretched, desiccated skin hug the tops of several nearby towers.

Hunched possessively near each nest is a snarling dragon. Two of them have stony hides, and the other two glow with internal heat. All four have an emaciated, skeletal look about them.

Cauldrus has left his creations unattended since the murders began. He hopes that the elemental nature of the catastrophic dragons insulates them from the degeneration caused by a series of undead grafts, and he is waiting to see the results after the dragons starve to death. The characters can reach the nests by scaling the exterior of one of the towers (the central tower is the easiest to climb) or by climbing the stairs in the tower closest to the bottom of the map.

Stone Catwalks: The catwalks are wide and do not require any checks to traverse. If a tower falls, it also pulls down any catwalks connected to that tower.



Nesting Towers: The nesting towers are on the brink of collapse. If a dragon and its nest are destroyed, that tower begins to crumble and falls after 3 rounds or as soon as no creatures remain on the tower. It is a 50-foot drop to the rooftops of the manor.

Climbing a tower requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Dragons: The dragons are still alive, but due to the Barrowmere patriarch's experiments, they count as both living and undead for the purpose of powers and abilities that affect creatures of either sort.

Nests: Cauldrus has tied the dragons' life force to their nests. A DC 17 Arcana check or Religion check enables a character to discern a strong connection between each creature and its nest, such that destroying a nest would severely damage the dragon associated with it. A nest is difficult terrain, has 100 hit points, has vulnerable 10 fire, and is always hit by an attack. If a nest is destroyed, the dragon closest to that nest when the encounter began takes damage equal to its bloodied value.

Ornamentation: Heavy gothic ornamentation covers the exterior of the towers. Thanks to these decorations, a creature that falls off the edge of a tower gains a +3 bonus to its saving throw to catch itself.

Treasure: A level 11 uncommon or rare magic item is hidden beneath a loose stone in the central tower. Finding the treasure requires a successful DC 25 Perception check.

Tactics: The dragons rabidly attack the fresh meat that has walked into their lair. They are poor fliers and stay on the ground whenever possible. Each creature single-mindedly pursues any characters who attack its nest; otherwise, the dragons focus on the nearest targets.

Special: At the end of the fight, take note of which of the nesting towers have fallen and which remain standing. This area is used again in Event 3.3: Cauldrus Barrowmere.

2 Young Earthquake Dragons (E) **Level 9 Elite Soldier**
Large elemental magical beast (earth, dragon) XP 800 each

HP 206; **Bloodied** 103 **Initiative** +12
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +9
Speed 8 (earth walk), burrow 4, fly 4 (clumsy) Darkvision, tremorsense 10
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Quaking Earth ✦ Aura** 1
When any enemy within the aura makes an attack that does not include the dragon as a target, that enemy falls prone and takes 5 damage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage.

⸸ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

⸸ **Earthen Maw ✦ Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead petrified (save ends).

Minor Actions

✧ **Rising Tremors ✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when *quaking earth* is aura 1
Effect: The *quaking earth* expands to aura 3. At the start of the dragon's next turn, the *quaking earth* expands to aura 5. At the start of its following turn, the dragon makes the following attack.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone and cannot stand up (save ends).
Effect: The *quaking earth* aura reverts to its original state and size (aura 1).

Triggered Actions

Sudden Quake ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The dragon is pulled, pushed, slid, or knocked prone.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura falls prone.

Str 21 (+9)	**Dex** 22 (+10)	**Wis** 20 (+9)
Con 23 (+10)	**Int** 19 (+8)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

2 Young Volcanic Dragons (V) **Level 10 Elite Brute**
Large elemental magical beast (fire, dragon) XP 1,000 each

HP 264; **Bloodied** 132 **Initiative** +10
AC 22, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22 **Perception** +11
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy) Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Noxious Fumes** (poison) **✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 5 poison damage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** (fire) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target loses all fire resistance until the end of the dragon's next turn.

⸸ **Double Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The dragon uses *bite* and *claw* or uses *claw* twice.

Minor Actions

✧ **Growing Heat** (fire) **✦ Recharge** at the start of any turn when *noxious fumes* is aura 1
Effect: The *noxious fumes* expands to aura 3. At the start of the dragon's next turn, the *noxious fumes* expands to aura 5. At the start of its following turn, the dragon makes the following attack.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 4 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
Effect: The *noxious fumes* aura reverts to its original state and size (aura 1).

Lava Vent (fire, zone) **✦ Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: The dragon creates a zone in an area burst 1 within 10 squares that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that enters the zone or starts its turn there takes 5 fire damage.

Triggered Actions

Sudden Flare (fire) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The dragon is hit by a fire attack.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's *noxious fumes* aura takes 5 fire damage.

Str 24 (+12)	**Dex** 21 (+10)	**Wis** 23 (+11)
Con 22 (+11)	**Int** 18 (+9)	**Cha** 20 (+10)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic, Primordial

Day 2

Before the events of this day are half over, death will have claimed members of both houses, and the heroes are hot on the trail of the culprit. By the end of the day, the culprit—Shard—has returned the favor.

Event 2.1: A Grim, Gray Morning

Roleplaying Encounter

On the morning of the second day, the characters are free to explore and interact with the city. Beyond any optional research they might undertake, two important events come to their attention.

First, at the start of the day, word spreads through Gloomwrought that a Vistani caravan has arrived and is camped at the Carnival Grounds in the Fettered Ward.

Second, if the characters do not immediately seek out Izran and Amalia, a courier from the Veiled League brings them a message. It reads as follows:

Your assistance yesterday was invaluable, and we would like to request your skills once more. Plans are afoot to put an end to the war between our houses before it spreads to the streets. Please meet us in the Plaza of Gargoyles at your earliest convenience.

Yours,
Izran & Amalia

Treasure: None.

Vistani Lore

With a DC 17 Streetwise check, the characters can learn the following information about the Vistani.

Nomads, gypsies, performers, and planar travelers, the Vistani are beholden to no lord or government. They are known as expert diviners and soothsayers.

It is unwise to anger the Vistani, because they can cast terrible curses.

The Vistani bring joy and celebration to every domain within the Shadowfell, and they are said to know a cure for the gloom and despair that grips its people.

Izran and Amalia

Izran and Amalia have arranged a meeting later today between Everen and Marice to talk about peace between their houses. They would like the characters' help in ensuring that the meeting goes smoothly.

The meeting is to take place in the late afternoon at the Dark Lady, the fountain whose magic should ensure fair dealings. Both individuals are coming alone and in disguise, so as not to arouse suspicion from Cauldrus or Devina.

If the characters neutralized the Barrowmere Nests and the Umberfell Darkwell, Marice and Everen might be able to enforce a peace agreement and supplant their parents as heads of their respective houses.

Tensions are high as a result of the attacks on the nests and the Darkwell. Izran and Amalia would like the characters to watch the meeting from a hidden location in or above the plaza of the Dark Lady, ready to intervene if anything goes awry.

The young nobles will wait, along with Golthor, in the Plaza of Gargoyles, until the characters return with their report about the meeting.

Shard

Shard doesn't care that Izran and Amalia survived the shadow stranglers' attack as long as their two houses ultimately go to war. He spied on the young nobles while they were making plans, and he intends to foil the peace process before it can start. Shard has left the plaza before the party arrives there.

Event 2.2: A Chance for Peace

Roleplaying Encounter

The party has agreed to watch for trouble during the meeting between Everen and Marice. Allow the characters to make whatever preparations they wish and set up at a spot where they can see the Dark Lady. However, neither Everen nor Marice shows up at the appointed time.

Perception DC 17: The characters hear a scream from down a side street.

When the adventurers follow the screaming, they pass a hysterical old man who points them down a dark, twisting alleyway.

They round the corner of the alley just in time to witness the death of Everen, who is poorly disguised as a carnival barker in stage makeup and loud clothing. Shard, perched on a nearby balcony, has just strangled the noble with a noose of shadow. The gargoyle's claws are noticeably glistening with blood.

On the ground nearby lies the body of Marice, disguised as a circus acrobat in bright leathers and sequins, gutted by a vicious wound obviously inflicted by a set of claws.

Upon seeing the characters, Shard retracts the noose into his black crystal and prepares to flee the scene.

If the characters pursue him, go to Event 2.3: Chasing Shard. If they return to the Plaza of Gargoyles to tell Izran and Amalia what happened, go to Event 2.4: Bad News.

Treasure: None.

Event 2.3: Chasing Shard

Skill Challenge Level 9 (800 XP)

The characters have caught the murderer in the act and have given chase. In this skill challenge, they pursue Shard through the streets and over the rooftops of Gloomwrought. Chasing a flying quarry through a crowded city is no easy task.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (800 XP).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per minute.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Perception, Streetwise, Thievery.

Acrobatics (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character is able to balance across the slick rooftops and balconies while pursuing Shard.

Athletics (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character scales a wall or leaps between buildings to keep up with the gargoyle. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge.

Perception (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character keeps Shard in sight, directing the rest of the party in the chase.

Streetwise (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character remembers several good ambush points along Shard's path. A result of 25 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Endurance.

Dungeoneering (DC 17): The character intuits shortcuts through buildings that bypass the streets, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Streetwise check in the challenge.

Endurance (DC 25): The character races through the streets to keep Shard in sight, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Perception check in the challenge.

Optional: Many characters, especially rangers, have abilities that can slow a target or knock it prone. You can allow use of these abilities (comparing an attack roll to Shard's defenses as given in Event 3.4: Shard's Payback) in place of a character's skill check to grant the party a +2 bonus to its next check in the challenge.

Success: The characters corner Shard, bringing him to ground in a back alley.

Failure: The heroes lose track of Shard, although they get a good look at him before he escapes.

Treasure: None.

Development

If the party catches up with Shard, the gargoyle is forced to break his magic crystal and teleport to a safe house. Read:

Backed into an alley with nowhere to run or fly, the gargoyle throws a crystal to the ground at his feet and vanishes in a swirl of shadow. Only broken pieces of black glass remain.

When the party confronts Shard again later, the gargoyle does not have his shadow powers.

Event 2.4: Bad News

Roleplaying Encounter

Whether or not the heroes decided to chase Shard, this event occurs when they return to the Plaza of Gargoyles to deliver their report to all the interested parties.

Izran, Amalia, and Golthor seek out the characters immediately upon their arrival and ask them what happened. At this point, the characters should relate their recent experiences, ending with Shard's escape (however it happened).

Izran and Amalia

At the news of their siblings' deaths, Izran is overwrought and full of self-recrimination, and Amalia burns with cold anger. They are more determined than ever to avert a war between Barrowmere and Umberfell, which would leave many more people dead in the streets. They believe they are safe under Golthor's protection and refuse any suggestion to move to a different place of safety. The nobles ask the characters to leave them and return tomorrow.

Golthor

If the heroes bring their eyewitness evidence of Shard's involvement in the murders to Golthor, the chieftain reacts stoically. A character who makes a DC 25 Insight check can tell that he is hiding something. If that character then asks Golthor to elaborate, the chieftain reveals to the characters that he knows Shard is guilty, but he does not want to bring dishonor upon his tribe (and himself) by actively participating in bringing Shard to ground. Instead, Golthor tries to strike a deal with the characters.

The chieftain says that he is willing to compromise. Izran and Amalia are dear to his rocky heart, and he would like to see peace between their houses. If the characters can apprehend the rogue gargoyle, he will join them in proclaiming Shard's guilt and see that justice is done.

Event 2.5: Ambush

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,750 XP)

Shard is tired of the adventurers' interference and hires thugs from the local gang known as Midnight's Own to kill the party.

The thugs set up an ambush as the characters travel through Gloomwrought that evening. No tactical map is provided for this encounter; any city setting will do, such as the battle map in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*.

Perception DC 17: A character notices a group of toughs following the party.

Light: Dim light shines from intermittent lanterns.

Monsters: 3 Midnight arrows, 3 Midnight catchers, 3 Midnight drifters.

To begin the encounter, read:

An old woman lies crumpled in a nearby doorway. "Help me, please. I've been robbed!"

Regardless of whether the characters approach the old woman or turn away from her, the thugs attack. Make it clear from their chatter during combat that the assault is not a random mugging.

Treasure: Roll a random level 9 treasure parcel (*Rules Compendium*, page 300) to see what the fallen gang members were carrying.

Lore: The old woman is a member of Midnight's Own, helping to set up the ambush for the younger thugs to exploit. She is more nimble than she appears and slips away when the fight gets under way.

Tactics: These gang members are young and inexperienced. They rush the characters and make little effort to coordinate their attacks. If more than half the thugs fall, the remaining gang members flee, believing they have lost their strength in numbers.

Midnight's Own

If any members of the gang are captured and questioned, they reveal that a cloaked figure hired them to kill the party. He was enormous and had a gravelly voice, and there was something wrong with his back—perhaps some kind of growth. (They're describing Shard, who approached them while wearing a cloak to hide his wings and a cowl to hide his face.)

3 Midnight Catchers **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid, human XP 350 each

HP 87; **Bloodied** 43 **Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 6, climb 3 Low-light vision

Traits

Street Agility
The catcher ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

Ground Pound (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when an enemy adjacent to the catcher falls prone
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 9 damage, and the target cannot stand until the end of the catcher's next turn.

Minor Actions

Net Drag (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The catcher pulls the target up to 2 squares.

Triggered Actions

Staggering Retaliation (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the catcher moves away from it or makes an attack that doesn't include the catcher as a target.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.

Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +13, Stealth +11
Str 19 (+8) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 10 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, club, net

3 Midnight Drifters **Level 9 Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid, human XP 400

HP 95; **Bloodied** 47 **Initiative** +11
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +8
Speed 6, climb 3 Low-light vision

Traits

Combat Advantage
The drifter deals 1d8 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Street Agility
The drifter ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.

Standard Actions

Quarterstaff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and the drifter can slide the target 1 square.

Spinning Knockdown (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and the drifter slides the target up to 2 squares and knocks it prone.

Move Actions

Staff Vault ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: The drifter jumps up to its speed, moving vertically or horizontally. It provokes opportunity attacks only for leaving the square it occupied before this movement.

Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +12, Stealth +14
Str 16 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, quarterstaff

3 Midnight Arrows **Level 10 Artillery**
Medium shadow humanoid, human XP 500

HP 82; **Bloodied** 41 **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22 **Perception** +9
Speed 6, climb 3 Low-light vision

Traits

Street Agility
The arrow ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.

Glancing Shot (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and another creature within 3 squares of the target takes 5 damage.

Double Shot ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: The arrow uses *glancing shot* twice.

Triggered Actions

Vengeful Arrow ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the arrow with a ranged or an area attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The arrow uses *glancing shot* against the triggering enemy.

Skills Acrobatics +15, Athletics +11, Stealth +15
Str 12 (+6) **Dex** 21 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 10 (+5)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, club, longbow, 20 arrows

Day 3

On this day, matters come to a head—in every sense of the word, as the characters confront the leaders of both houses. Even if they succeed in preventing all-out war, there's still the gargoyle assassin to contend with.

Event 3.1: A Day of Blood

Roleplaying Encounter

A messenger from the Veiled League brings a note to the characters at the dawn of the third day. Izran and Amalia are ready to meet with them again.

Izran and Amalia

Due to the deaths of their siblings, Izran and Amalia believe that full-scale war between their houses is unavoidable as long as their parents remain in power.

They propose a coup. With the party's help, Izran and Amalia can force their parents to step down and can take control of their houses.

After the young nobles are acknowledged as the new leaders of their houses, they will marry. Barrowmere and Umberfell will merge into a single noble line, forever averting war.

Izran hopes to avoid bloodshed, but he doubts their parents will listen to reason. One way or another, Cauldrus and Devina must step down before the end of the day.

Izran and Amalia will accompany the party to confront their parents. With the heirs of the houses at their side, the characters will have no trouble navigating the manors.

Shard

Shard remains in hiding after his close call with the adventurers yesterday. He dares not strike at Izran and Amalia again or risk running afoul of the characters. At this point, Shard believes that he has done all he can, and the gargoyle is willing to let events play out. Failure would be a setback, but he can bide his time and wait for another chance to supplant Golthor.

Event 3.2: Devina Umberfell

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,900 XP)

Devina has retreated to the Darkwell and is using a *lightseed* she possesses to force open its severed connection to the Shadowheart. She has animated the greenhouse statuary to serve as her guardians.

Perception DC 18: A character hears chanting coming from the greenhouse that holds the Darkwell.

Light: Dim light shines during the daytime; the area is in darkness at night.

Monsters: Devina Umberfell, 5 runic statues.

To begin the encounter, read:

The vegetation in the greenhouse is withered and dry. Five shadar-kai statues stand covered in runes of black wax, and Devina Umberfell moves briskly around a dry well at the back of the room.

"Using my lightseed!" Amalia cries. "Mother, you're such an amateur."

Devina believes, correctly, that Amalia had a hand in poisoning the Darkwell, and she also wonders if her daughter was behind the murders of her own relatives. When Amalia shows up with armed mercenaries (the party), Devina assumes the worst and prepares to fight to the death.

Amalia quickly deduces the intent—and the ruinous consequences—of her mother's ritual and tries to stop it. This act of rebellion further confirms Devina's suspicions, and a fight breaks out.

Wilted Plants: The plants are difficult terrain, but sapped of life, they do not provide concealment. Any fire attack that includes the dry and brittle plants sets that section of greenery (bounded by the paths) on fire. Smoke from the fire provides total concealment, and a creature that enters the flames or starts its turn in them takes 5 fire damage.

Darkwell: The Darkwell is now dry. A 50-foot drop leads down to the "plug" that severs the well from the rest of the city.

Devina's Ritual: Devina must use a minor action every round to attempt a DC 18 Arcana check. If she succeeds on five such checks, she completes her ritual. With each successful check, the manor shakes with increasing intensity. A character can attempt to counteract Devina's progress by making a DC 26 Arcana check as a minor action once per round. Success on this check removes Devina's most recent success.

Her ritual to gain control of the Shadowheart will work, although not as she anticipates. Gloomwrought reacts to the completion of the ritual by absorbing Devina and swallowing the entire Umberfell Manor, pulling into the Undercity. What that means for Devina and Gloomwrought is anyone's guess, but a living city suffering from unrelenting paranoia is a terrifying thought.

A character who makes a DC 26 Arcana check can deduce the nature of the ritual and its potential consequences.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: Devina focuses her attacks first on Amalia and then on any character who attempts to interrupt her ritual. The runic statues gang up on the character

5 Runic Statues **Level 9 Brute**
Medium natural animate (construct) XP 400 each

HP 118; **Bloodied** 59 **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 21 **Perception** +8
Speed 5
Immune disease, petrification; **Resist** 10 poison

Traits

Runes of Strength
At the start of the encounter, the statue has one rune of strength. It deals 1d12 extra damage per rune of strength it has beyond the first.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Stone Fist** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage. If the target is adjacent to one of the statue's allies, it is also knocked prone.

Triggered Actions

Runic Gift ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The statue drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The statue is destroyed, and each runic statue ally within 5 squares gains one additional rune of strength until the end of the encounter.

Str 22 (+10)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 18 (+8)	**Int** 3 (+0)	**Cha** 6 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Devina Umberfell (D) **Level 9 Elite Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai XP 900

HP 180; **Bloodied** 90 **Initiative** +6
AC 23, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +5
Speed 7 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Mistress of Shadows
When Devina takes cold or radiant damage from an attack, she gains temporary hit points equal to half the damage dealt by the attack.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Touch of Utter Dark** (cold) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 6 cold damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and slowed (save ends). If Devina scores a critical hit, the target's player immediately draws a despair card, if you are using the Despair Deck.

⊘ **Blaze of Light** (radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 6 radiant damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Devina's next turn.

Between Darkness and Light ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Devina uses *touch of utter dark* and *blaze of light* in either order against two different targets.

Minor Actions

Shadows Live (conjuration) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Requirement: Devina must have at least 1 shadow replica active.
Effect: A shadow replica appears in a square on the ground adjacent to Devina.

Shadow Replicas (conjuration) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Devina conjures five shadow replicas within 5 squares of her on the ground, and she becomes invisible until no replicas remain. Each replica can be attacked and has her defenses and 1 hit point. Devina has line of effect and line of sight from a replica, and can use a replica as the origin square for attacks, including opportunity attacks. Devina can use a move action to move a single replica up to 7 squares along the ground.

Skills Arcana +14, Stealth +11

Str 12 (+5)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 10 (+4)	**Int** 20 (+9)	**Cha** 18 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

nearest to Devina and try to remain within 5 squares of one another so as to benefit from *runic gift*.

Event 3.3: Cauldrus Barrowmere

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Cauldrus plans to use the towers of House Barrowmere as the focal point for a necromantic ritual that will wake all his undead troops and unleash them upon House Umberfell.

Cauldrus has raised bone scaffoldings to replace two of the nesting towers that fell during Event 1.5. If more than two nests were destroyed, pick two at random that are already replaced with scaffolding. Cauldrus attempts to erect more scaffolding, if necessary, during this encounter.

Perception DC 20: A character spots a giant skeletal dragon in the process of weaving dark webs between the towers.

Light: Dim light during the daytime, darkness at night.

Monsters: Cauldrus Barrowmere.

When the characters enter this area, read:

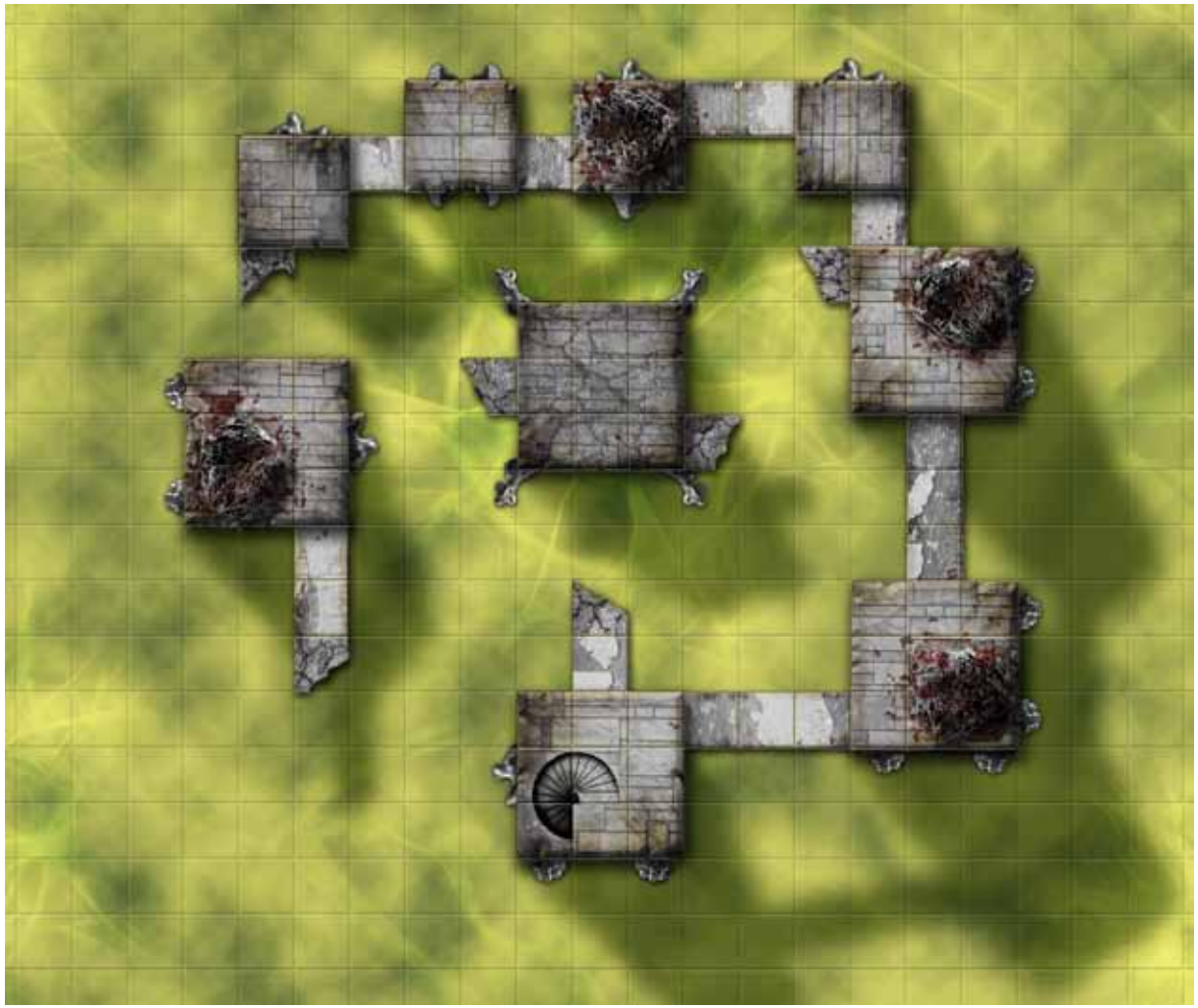
Constructions of rickety bone scaffolding supplement the few remaining towers rising above Barrowmere Manor. Cauldrus flies heavily from tower to tower, his body fused into the ribcage of a large, skeletal dragon. He weaves thick strands of black magic from his claws.

"This should have been you!" Cauldrus hisses at Izran, the words issuing both from his mouth and the dragon's. "Look at what you've made me do."

Unable to complete his experiments because of Everen's death and Izran's disappearance, Cauldrus has melded his body with that of his latest creation. He plans to unleash the full might of Barrowmere's undead upon Gloomwrought. Perhaps in the ensuing death and destruction, he will find a new direction for his research.

Izran and any characters who succeed on a DC 26 Religion check understand that Cauldrus is working to wake the undead and command them to kill all living creatures on sight.

When the encounter begins, Cauldrus is in the air between the central tower and one of the newly erected pieces of bone scaffolding, preparing to connect the two locations with webbing and advance the progress of his ritual.



The first time Cauldrus is bloodied in this encounter, he uses *broken line between life and death*. When that occurs, read:

Cauldrus breaks apart in a shower of bone and flesh. Instead of separating cleanly from the skeletal dragon, his living body and the skeleton coalesce in strange ways, creating two new entities.

Catwalks: The remaining catwalks are wide and can be traversed without any checks.

Ornamentation: Heavy gothic ornamentation covers the exterior of the towers. Thanks to these decorations, a creature that falls off the edge of a tower gains a +3 bonus to its saving throw to catch itself.

Scaffolding: Two of the fallen nesting towers have been replaced by rickety bone scaffolding. The scaffolding is sturdy enough to walk on, but every time it takes damage, roll a d20. On a result of 10 or higher, that scaffolding collapses. It is a 50-foot drop to the rooftops of the manor. Cauldrus can magically reassemble one fallen scaffold per round with a standard action. The scaffolding requires a DC 13 Athletics check to climb.

Towers: Climbing one of the still-standing towers requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Webs: The magic webs of the ritual are solid. At the start of combat, webs connect the central tower to every other tower but not to any of the scaffolding (or any of the towers that have not yet been replaced with scaffolding). A character can move at half speed over the webs without problem or at full speed with a DC 18 Acrobatics check. When a scaffold falls, any attached webs disintegrate. A character on the edge of any tower on the perimeter can use a standard action to break its web connection to the central tower. A character on one of the edges of the central tower can use a standard action to break one of the webs connecting it to a tower on the perimeter.

Ritual: Cauldrus has nearly finished waking the dead, and the party's presence is an unwelcome interruption. Once per round, he can use a minor action to create webs between the central tower and a different tower or piece of scaffolding. If Cauldrus connects all the towers and the scaffolding to the central tower, the ritual is complete, and the undead of House Barrowmere begin to rise. If all the webs are cut, the ritual is ruined and cannot be restarted.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: Cauldrus tries to focus on completing his ritual instead of dealing exclusively with the characters. (In other words, he uses his minor actions to create webs as often as he can, resorting to *festering wound* only if a prime opportunity presents itself.

Cauldrus Barrowmere **Level 12 Solo Brute**
Large undead humanoid (dragon, undead), shadar-kai XP 3,500

HP 320; **Bloodied** 160 **Initiative** +6
AC 24, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24 **Perception** +6
Speed 6, fly 6 (clumsy) Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

☼ **Life from Death ✦ Aura** 5
Whenever an enemy in the aura takes ongoing necrotic damage, Cauldrus gains an equal number of temporary hit points.

Action Recovery
Whenever Cauldrus ends his turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on him ends.

Standard Actions

⨭ **Contagious Bite** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). One enemy within 5 squares of the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).
Miss: Ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

⨭ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d10 + 4 damage.

✧ **Septic Breath** (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + 4 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). If a target is already taking ongoing necrotic damage, that damage increases by 5.
Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). If a target is already taking ongoing necrotic damage, that damage increases by 5.

Minor Actions

✧ **Festering Wounds** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst taking ongoing necrotic damage); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d12 + 7 necrotic damage.

Triggered Actions

↯ **Reflexive Bite ✦ At-Will**
Trigger: Cauldrus is hit with an attack while bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Cauldrus uses *bite*.

Broken Line Between Life and Death ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Cauldrus is first bloodied.
Effect (No Action): All effects on Cauldrus end, and he is removed from play and replaced by two Medium versions of himself that appear in the two nearest unoccupied squares. Each new Cauldrus is bloodied and has 80 hit points, and acts on Caldrus' original initiative count. The two creatures count as one for the purpose of expending and recharging powers, and can only roll to recharge a power once per round. Both have a full set of actions on their turn. Each Cauldrus can take one immediate action per round.

Skills Religion +16
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 10 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+6)
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 20 (+11) **Cha** 8 (+5)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common

If the ritual is ruined, he methodically attacks the heroes one at a time.

Cauldrus becomes much more formidable when he uses *broken line between life and death*, because he is now able to use a standard action to attack and another to build more scaffolding in the same round.

Event 3.4: Shard's Payback

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,700 XP)

If peace is restored between Barrowmere and Umberfell, Golthor is willing to help the adventurers administer justice to Shard. The assassin has failed in his task, so the chieftain now feels safe in moving against him.

Golthor informs the party that the gargoyles are obligated by their pact to intervene in any fight that breaks out in the Plaza of Gargoyles. He suggests that if the characters can stage a mock brawl between themselves, Shard might be drawn out of hiding.

Golthor will instruct the other gargoyles not to interfere in the fight, under the pretense of giving Shard the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities. This plan carries a risk–if Shard quells the disturbance on his own, Golthor might be forced to step down. However, the chieftain expects the adventurers to be victorious.

What Golthor doesn't know is that when Shard arrives on the scene, he is soon joined by four other lesser gargoyles under his control. As a result, the characters will find it much more difficult to apprehend Shard than either they or Golthor expected would be the case.

The area around the two large statues is an ideal space for the mock fight. The statues are what remain of two immense gargoyles that turned to stone after breaking up a brawl over a century ago.

To satisfy the chieftain, Shard must be defeated but not killed. If he dies, Golthor will consider the characters enemies.

The characters begin the encounter anywhere within the area bounded by the buildings. The map does not indicate the locations of the gargoyles, enabling you to bring them in wherever you want. During the second round of the staged fight, Shard descends from a building high above the plaza. The other gargoyles emerge from the edges of the map in the following round.

THE RISEN DEAD

If Cauldrus completes his ritual, the assault by House Barrowmere's vast undead army takes Gloomwrought by surprise. Many of the city's nobility perish, the Deathless Palace is sacked, and Prince Rolan vanishes, presumed dead. The Ebony Guard closes the Dust Quarter, barricades the streets, and struggles to put down the hordes of undead within. Chaos and anarchy reign, and Gloomwrought becomes more dangerous than ever.

Light: Dim light shines from lanterns around the Plaza of Gargoyles.

Monsters: Shard (gargoyle), 2 hornstone gargoyles, 2 ironstone gargoyles.

Statues: The two Large gargoyle statues provide superior cover. A character can climb a statue with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Difficult Terrain: The piles of trash in this area are difficult terrain.

Treasure: Golthor rewards the party for humiliating Shard by giving the characters a level 13 uncommon or rare magic item.

Shard and His Allies: Shard intervenes in the fight at the start of the second round. One round later, four gargoyles join the fight in support of Shard.

Power of Shadows: If the party did not catch up to Shard in Event 2.3, the gargoyle assassin draws on the power of his crystal to enhance his abilities. He gains partial concealment for the duration of the encounter, as well as 2 action points.

Tactics: Shard spends his first round of activity high above the battle using *stone form*, emerging at the start of the next round to attack the party. He is sadistic and prefers to kill a bloodied character before dealing with healthy opponents. If he still has his shadow powers, he opens with *swoop attack* and spends an action point to return to *stone form* at the end of his turn.

Shard's gargoyle allies join the fight in the round after he appears. They attack characters indiscriminately with no regard for teamwork.

Shard, Gargoyle Assassin **Level 9 Lurker**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 400

HP 77; **Bloodied** 38 **Initiative** +11
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19 **Perception** +12
Speed 6, fly 8 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.

↓ **Swoop Attack ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The gargoyle flies up to its fly speed and uses *claw* at the end of the move. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Stone Form ✦ At-Will
Effect: The gargoyle enters stone form until it ends the effect as a minor action. While in this form, it gains tremorsense 10 and resist 25 to all damage, gains 5 temporary hit points at the start of each of its turns, and cannot take actions except to end the effect. When the gargoyle ends the effect, it gains a +20 bonus to its next damage roll before the end of its next turn.

Skills Stealth +12

Str 21 (+9)	**Dex** 17 (+7)	**Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 5 (+1)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Primordial

2 Hornstone Gargoyles **Level 8 Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 350 each

HP 107; **Bloodied** 53 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19 **Perception** +12
Speed 6, fly 8 Darkvision
Immune petrification

Traits

Lurking Presence
The hornstone gargoyle gains a +10 bonus to Stealth checks against enemies' passive Perception.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the gargoyle can use *skewering drag* as a free action.

↓ **Impaling Charge ✦ At-Will**
Effect: The gargoyle charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 5 damage until the grab ends.

Move Actions

Skewering Drag ✦ At-Will
Effect: The gargoyle moves half its speed, pulling a creature grabbed by the gargoyle with it. The gargoyle and the creature grabbed by it do not provoke opportunity attacks from each other for this movement.

Skills Stealth +12

Str 22 (+10)	**Dex** 16 (+7)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 5 (+1)	**Cha** 11 (+4)

Alignment evil **Languages** Primordial

2 Ironstone Gargoyles	Level 7 Skirmisher
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)	XP 300 each
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40	**Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision
Immune petrification	
Traits	
Lurking Presence	
The ironstone gargoyle gains a +10 bonus to Stealth checks against enemies' passive Perception.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Crashing Stride** ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞	
Effect: The gargoyle shifts 4 squares and uses *claw* against two different targets at any point during the shift. When an attack hits, the gargoyle slides the target 1 square and knocks it prone.	
Move Actions	
Leaping Glide ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The gargoyle flies 4 squares without provoking opportunity attacks.	
Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +12	
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 7 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+3)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Primordial	

Shard in Defeat

Shard knows that Golthor will not allow him to be killed by a pack of upstart adventurers. He takes pleasure in railing on about the futility of the heroes' accomplishments. Use the following statements as guidelines for Shard's conversation after the battle.

"Why did I kill all those people? Why was I trying to start a war between Barrowmere and Umberfell? Because Golthor asked me to."

"You know who put Golthor up to the job? Prince Rolan, that's who."

"What are you going to do about it? Nothing! Prince Rolan could crush you like a bug, if he cares. Don't make him care."

"We've had our fun, and now you're going to let me walk away. Pray that I'm too busy to be bothered with you in the future."

Aftermath

If Izran and Amalia survive the adventure and the characters succeed in averting war, the young nobles are quickly confirmed as the new heads of their houses. A wedding date is set for a week later, with the heroes as guests of honor. Barrowmere and Umberfell merge into a new noble house that inspires a renaissance in the city's shadar-kai nobility.

If Izran is killed in combat during the adventure, Amalia withdraws from the world and pursues her studies of nethermancy to the exclusion of all else. When she returns to society years later, she is a bitter, heartless witch with an eye toward supplanting Prince Rolan.

If Amalia is killed in combat, Izran leaves Gloomwrought for Letherna, the domain of the Raven Queen. He hopes to petition her for Amalia's soul and is never seen again.

If both Izran and Amalia are killed, Prince Rolan quietly annexes their properties under a variety of assumed identities.

If Golthor remains chieftain of the gargoyles, he continues his slow plans to release his tribe from its contract. If the characters remain in Gloomwrought, he might have jobs for them in the future.

Whatever else happens, the heroes have made enemies of Shard and have been noticed by Prince Rolan. Neither occurrence is likely to make their lives in Gloomwrought easier in the future.

Treasure: Izran and Amalia reward the heroes for their efforts with a level 12 uncommon or rare magic item, as well as 8,400 gp. In addition, the characters are welcome in both manor houses for as long as their current occupants remain in them.

If either of the young nobles is killed during the adventure, the treasure is reduced to a token monetary reward of 2,000 gp, given out either by the surviving noble or by Golthor (if both nobles die).

Optional Encounters

1: Gathering Information

Skill Challenge Level 10 (2,000 XP)

Gloomwrought is a city of secrets, and those secrets are for sale—if you know the right people. Adventurers with wagging mouths and open pockets are just as likely to be knifed in a back alley as to find the information they seek. The key to learning what Gloomwrought knows is to take what you can and give nothing in return.

In this skill challenge, the adventurers are searching the city for information that is not obvious or readily available. Most likely, they are trying to learn about Amalia, Izran, Golthor, Shard, the Barrowmeres, or the Umberfells. You can also use this skill challenge for attempts to gain other kinds of information.

Skill Challenge

Level: 10 (2,000 XP).

Complexity: 4 (requires 10 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per hour.

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise.

Bluff (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character convinces people to talk without revealing exactly

what he or she wants to know. A result of 26 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one.

Diplomacy (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character convinces a guard or a city official to grant the party access to restricted areas, private libraries, or classified documents. With a result of 26 or higher on this check, the character can choose to remove a failure that has been earned in the challenge rather than count this result as a success.

History (DC 26, two successes maximum): The character sifts through old tomes and records in search of clues. Alternatively, he or she remembers stories about the desired topic that point the party toward another avenue of research.

Insight (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character can tell if someone is trustworthy or likely to stab the heroes in the back. The first time a character fails this check with a result of 13 or higher, it counts as a success instead of a failure.

Intimidate (DC 26, two successes maximum): The character terrifies a target into revealing what he or she knows. If the party earns both successes possible with this check, it can then use Stealth as a primary skill.

Stealth (DC 26, two successes maximum, usable after two Intimidate successes): The character follows a frightened target who checks on a store of information, finds or hides documents, or reports to a superior.

Streetwise (DC 18, four successes maximum): The character knows how to find the desired information in Gloomwrought. With a result of 26 or higher on this check, the party comes across a shrine of the Hooded Lantern, where the priests of Pelor restore one lost or spent healing surge to each character.

Secondary Skills: Perception, Thievery.

Perception (DC 18): The character spots people who might be taking an interest in the party's activities, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Insight check in the challenge.

Thievery (DC 18): The character picks a pocket and finds a key or scrap of information, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Bluff check or Streetwise check in the challenge.

Success: The characters find all the information there is to know on the topic of their research (as detailed in "The Cast" at the beginning of the adventure).

Failure: With each failed check in the challenge, the party is attacked by some of Gloomwrought's less savory elements who sense opportunity in the group of clueless adventurers. Interrupt the skill challenge with one of the following combats (chosen at random or according to whichever is most appropriate for the situation).

- 2 human duelists, 1 human transmuter, 10 human thugs (level 8 encounter; 1,750 XP; see Monster Vault for statistics).
- 5 hunting lightdrinkers (level 9 encounter; 2,000 XP; see *Dungeon* 190 for statistics).
- 3 Midnight catchers, 2 Midnight drifters (level 8 encounter; 1,850 XP; see *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond* for statistics).
- 2 minotaur magi, 3 minotaur chargers (level 9 encounter; 2,000 XP; see *Monster Vault* for statistics)

If the party accrues three failures, conventional sources of information go to ground, and the characters can no longer gather information on that topic. See Encounter 2: The Vistani Caravan for ways to mitigate this problem.

2: The Vistani Caravan

Skill Challenge Level 9 (400 XP)

The Vistani trade with anyone, but it takes more than deep pockets to gain access to one of the caravan's powerful diviners. Prospective customers must prove their abilities to members of the caravan, for a fortune-teller's asking price is not always gold.

In this skill challenge, the adventurers attempt to win their way past the Vistani to gain an audience with the caravan's fortune-teller.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (400 XP).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per minute.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Diplomacy, History, Thievery.

Acrobatics (DC 17): The character outperforms a Vistani acrobat on the high wire. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Athletics (DC 17): The character beats all challengers in an impromptu wrestling contest. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Diplomacy (DC 17, one success maximum): The character impresses upon the Vistani the urgency of the party's mission.

History (DC 17, one success maximum): The character tells a story of his or her adventures that demonstrates the party's strength and valor.

Thievery (DC 17): The character demonstrates his or her skills at sleight of hand to this group of reputed thieves. Alternatively, the character defeats a Vistani

in a game of knife throwing. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Secondary Skills: Arcana, Bluff.

Arcana (DC 17): The character uses magical illusion to emphasize another character's speech, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Diplomacy check or History check in the challenge.

Bluff (DC 17): The character distracts the Vistani during one of the competitions, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Acrobatics check or Athletics check in the challenge.

Note: Characters who have Vistani heritage gain a +2 bonus to their Diplomacy checks, even though they are not likely to be members of this caravan.

Success: The characters are granted an audience with Anezha, the caravan's fortune-teller.

Failure: The characters are turned away from the caravan with hoots and jeers. They can return and try again another day.

Treasure: None.

Anezha, Vistani Fortune-Teller

The fortune-teller, Anezha, was elevated to the position of matriarch almost two decades ago after fate overtook the caravan's previous leader in the hills surrounding Gloomwrought. She is always seeking competent adventurers to help the caravan with its problems in and around the city.

Anezha can provide some services to the party for the small price of an undisclosed favor. You can use this deal as a hook for later adventures.

- She can read her fortune cards and provide hints to the answers of questions the party has about the facts of the adventure up to the point when they encounter her.
- One time only, she can lift despair from the party's shoulders (all characters automatically overcome the effect of any despair cards with which they are afflicted and gain the boon on that card).

About the Author

Andrew Schneider is an author and freelance game designer in the Washington, DC area. His recent credits include *Gangs of Wheloon* (a Living Forgotten Realms™ adventure), "Creature Incarnations: Fomorians" (*Dungeon* 176), and "Channel Divinity: Ioun" (*Dragon* 385).

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